

JULY 2010

The American Conservative



The Men Our Media Forgot

Pulitzer Prize-winner Sydney Schanberg

Ron Unz ♦ Peter Richardson ♦ Gareth Porter ♦ Andrew J. Bacevich

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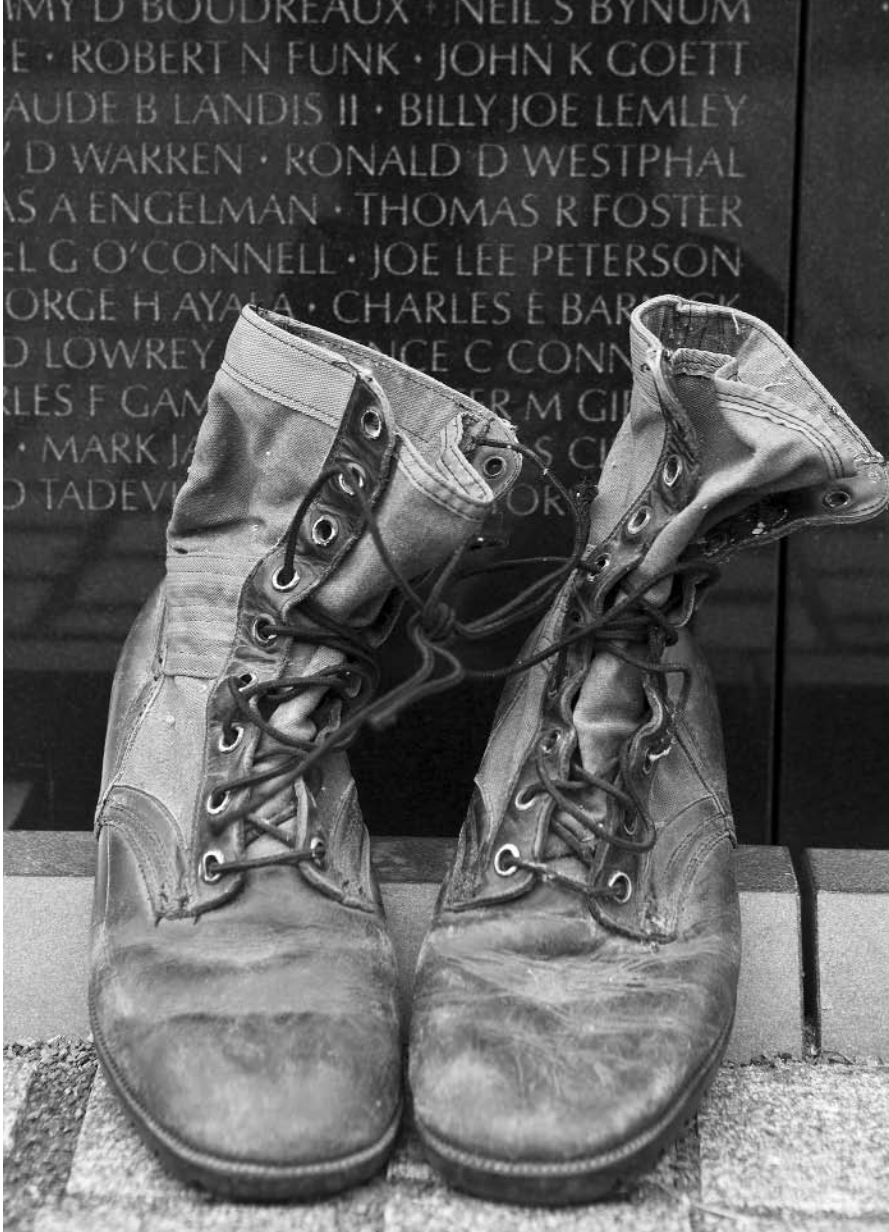
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[COVER]

McCain and the POW Cover-Up

BY SYDNEY SCHANBERG A mountain of evidence suggests that hundreds of soldiers were abandoned to die in Vietnam, but instead of exposing this betrayal, the American media has gone missing in action. **Page 10**

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COVER DESIGN: MARK GRAEF

[ELECTION]

A WINNING RAND

Rand Paul is not heading to Washington just yet. First the Kentucky Republican Senate candidate must face off against the Democratic contender, Attorney General Jack Conway, in November. But already Tea Party activists, antiwar conservatives, and libertarians brought into politics by the Ron Paul revolution are celebrating. Rand's May 18 win raises the possibility of "a Paul in each chamber" come January—with all that implies for shaking up the D.C. establishment.

As Rand built his momentum during the primary campaign, he attracted support from circles ever closer to the center of power. He was still an outsider when Sarah Palin endorsed him. Two weeks before primary day, Sen. Jim DeMint—angling to establish himself as champion of grassroots conservatives—endorsed Rand. Now even *Weekly Standard* editor William Kristol, the Sonny Corleone of neoconservatism, speaks softly. He told the *Washington Post's* David Weigel, "there's a lot of distance between Rand Paul's agenda, which isn't exactly mine, and the caricature of nativism or isolationism." Never mind that Kristol's magazine is the capital's leading purveyor of those caricatures.

All of this jumping onto the Randwagon does not mean the conservative movement's kingpins have mellowed toward antiwar, constitutionally minded conservatives, however. Their intransigence was on full display in the May 4 Indiana GOP primary that saw ex-senator and longtime lobbyist Dan Coats defeat former Rep. John Hostettler, a cast-iron fiscal conservative who was also one of just six House Republicans to vote against the Iraq War. DeMint played a critical role in Coats's victory by endorsing a third candidate, state Sen. Marlin Stutzman. The result was a split in the Tea Party vote and a win by Coats with just 39 percent of the total.

Every indication suggests that elec-



"WHICH COUNTRY SHOULD WE HAVE INVADED TO STOP YOU?"

tions this year will trend heavily against incumbents and insiders—already we've seen Florida Gov. Charlie Crist chased out of his Republican Senate primary by Mario Rubio, Utah Sen. Bob Bennett lose his party's nomination, and ex-Republican Arlen Specter defeated by Rep. Joe Sestak in Pennsylvania's Democratic Senate primary. Voters across the country want change—but how much will they get? The *Politico* speculates that Rand's victory might help DeMint in a bid to topple Sen. Mitch McConnell as Senate Republican leader. But DeMint remains, despite his last-minute intervention for Rand, a conventional Republican. As the Left has learned from Barack Obama, not everyone who preaches change represents a break with the status quo. Rand Paul is the genuine article, but many of those flocking to him are not.

[LIBERTIES]

TAKING THE FIFTH

When defending torture, neocons always reach for the ticking time bomb. Just like the movies, there's a red wire and a blue wire and a digital display ominously counting down. The bomb is hidden in a crowded metropolitan area; sometimes a school if they're going for extra pathos. Then there's the captured fiend who alone knows how to disarm it. Don't you want to save the city?

Waterboarding seems like a small price to pay (and once you've made that moral leap, why not the rack?). Even the most dedicated ACLU member would

be hard-pressed to argue that we should be reminding our villain of his right to remain silent. But does this mean we must dump Miranda—or at the very least, as Charles Krauthammer suggests, "modernize" it?

Under the public-safety exception, authorities can already put off reading a suspect his rights if they think he has time-sensitive information. But jihad watchers are up in arms that failed Times Square bomber Faisal Shahzad was Mirandized at all, even after a delay. Krauthammer and company want any suspected terrorist designated an unlawful enemy combatant and remanded to military custody, where citizen's rights don't apply. But if, he allows, you're one of those pesky constitutionalists "wedded to the civilian law-enforcement model," at least amend Miranda.

As things now stand, anything divulged before rights are read isn't admissible in court. Under Krauthammer's expanded exception, law enforcement would be able to interrogate possible terrorists without constraint and still use incriminating statements against them.

Unfortunately, the Obama administration agrees with him. Attorney General Eric Holder says he will ask Congress to make Miranda "flexible"—read: pliant to executive whim—and "more consistent with the threat that we now face."

That threat—not the incidence of terrorism so much as the specter—has convinced Americans that phones can be tapped without warrants, prisoners

can be held without charges, and a president can label as “state secret” anything he doesn’t want public. But a stooge with dynamite stuffed in his underpants is more the norm than an evil mastermind holding Gotham hostage. Weakening longstanding protections to accommodate scare scenarios is no way to make law—or to keep Americans safe.

[JUSTICE]

SUPREME POWER

When President Obama announced that he’d chosen Elena Kagan to replace John Paul Stevens on the Supreme Court, the Right’s reaction was predictable. Justice Kagan, conservatives complained, would uphold *Roe v. Wade*, boost affirmative action, and advance same-sex marriage. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell concluded that she would serve as a “rubber stamp” for the administration. But which administration?

After complaints that she’d written next to nothing that would shed light on her judicial philosophy, Kagan began schmoozing senators. She opened up to Dick Durbin, who revealed that she approved of recent rulings expanding presidential power. “She said that she thought that the court was moving in the right direction in a difficult era when we are truly dealing with the threat of terrorism,” Durbin said.

That Kagan favors the will of the president over the words of the Constitution only comes as a surprise to those who haven’t noticed that Obama’s first term looks as if it’s Bush’s third. As solicitor general, she has argued for Bush’s warrantless wiretapping program and fought a ruling that gives habeas corpus rights to detainees at a U.S. military base in Afghanistan. She’s as much an advocate of executive authority as the court’s most conservative members—and has worked much more directly to extend it.

The court is facing crucial questions on this front. Its rulings will set precedents on presidential power for genera-

tions to come, while a major abortion case is unlikely to come up any time soon. Few conservatives mourned the retirement of Justice Stevens. But with Kagan filling his spot, those who care about civil liberties should.

[MEDIA]

CLIPPED WINGS

Aviation Week is the bible of aerospace geeks. But even Holy Writ must be redacted when it doesn’t gibe with military-industrial advertisers. That’s what reporter Bill Sweetman discovered when he was banned from reporting on the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Sweetman, as *Wired* reports, “has authored over 30 books on military aircraft. ... Few journalists today know more about tactical aircraft.”

Indeed, Sweetman’s editors think he knows too much—and is too ready to speak his mind. Having been heavily critical of the over-budget, under-performing JSF on several earlier occasions, in March he wrote, “The program is no longer at risk of failure. It has already failed.” The next month, he wrote of an upcoming visit to JSF contractor Lockheed-Martin’s Ft. Worth plant, “Flacks are predicted to be numerous and persistent on the run-in and over the target, and bulls--t is expect to be dense throughout the mission. Synchronize watches and good luck.”

Soon *Aviation Week*’s editors put out a message of their own: “Following comments posted on his personal Facebook page, the editorial team has decided that Bill Sweetman will not be covering the F-35 program for a period of time. We will continue to hold our journalists to the highest standards of editorial integrity to best serve the aerospace and defense community”—including advertisers like Lockheed. What *Aviation Week* calls “the aerospace and defense community” is perhaps better known by handle President Eisenhower gave it: the military-industrial complex. Evidently that includes the venerable aerospace magazine as well. ■

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Was Rambo Right?

Hundreds of POWs may have been left to die in Vietnam, abandoned by their government—and our media.

By Ron Unz

IN THE CLOSING DAYS of the 2008 presidential campaign, I clicked an ambiguous link on an obscure website and stumbled into a parallel universe.

During the previous two years of that long election cycle, the media narrative surrounding Sen. John McCain had been one of unblemished heroism and selfless devotion to his fellow servicemen. Thousands of stories on television and in print had told of his brutal torture at the hands of his North Vietnamese captors, his steely refusal to crack, and his later political career aimed at serving the needs of fellow Vietnam veterans. This storyline had first reached the national stage during his 2000 campaign, then returned with even greater force as he successfully sought the 2008 Republican nomination. Seemingly accepted by all, this history became a centerpiece of his campaign. McCain's supporters touted his heroism as proof that he possessed the character to be entrusted with America's highest office, while his detractors merely sought to change the subject.

Once I clicked that link, I encountered a very different John McCain.

I read copious, detailed evidence that hundreds of American POWs had been condemned to death at enemy hands by top American leaders, apparently because their safe return home would have constituted a major political embarrassment. I found documen-

tation that the cover-up of this betrayal had gone on for decades, eventually drawing in a certain Arizona senator. According to this remarkable reconstruction of events, the average teenage moviegoer of the 1980s watching mindless action films such as "Rambo," "Missing in Action," and "Uncommon Valor" was seeing reality portrayed on screen, while the policy expert reading sober articles in the pages of *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic* was absorbing lies and propaganda. Since I had been believing those very articles, this was a stunning revelation.

But was this alternate description of reality correct? Could this one article be true and all the countless contrary pieces I had read in America's most prestigious publications be false, merely the presentation of official propaganda endlessly repeated? I cannot say. I am not an expert on the history of the Vietnam War and its aftermath.

Yet consider the source. The author of that remarkable 8,000-word exposé—"McCain and the POW Cover-Up," published on The Nation Institute's website—was Sydney Schanberg, one of America's foremost Vietnam War journalists. His reporting won him a Pulitzer Prize, and his subsequent book on Cambodia was made into "The Killing Fields," an Oscar-winning movie. Schanberg later

served as one of the highest-ranking editors at the *New York Times*, with a third of the reporters at our national newspaper of record working under him. A case can be made that no living American journalist can write with greater credibility on Vietnam War matters. And he had labored for years researching and exhaustively documenting the story of American POWs abandoned in Indochina—a story that if true might easily represent the single greatest act of national dishonor ever committed by our political leaders.

He presented a mass of evidence with names, dates, and documentary detail. Many of the individuals mentioned are still alive and could be interviewed or called to testify. Sealed government records could be ordered unsealed. If America wishes to determine the truth, it can do so.

Yet what I found most remarkable about Schanberg's essay were not its explosive historical claims but the absolute silence with which they were received in the mainstream media. In 2008, John McCain's heroic war record and personal patriotism were central to his quest for supreme power—a goal he came very close to achieving. But when one of America's most eminent journalists published an exhaustive report that the candidate had instead served as one of the leading figures in a monumental act of

national treachery, our media took no notice. McCain's public critics and the operatives of his Democratic opponent might eagerly seize upon every rumor that the senator had had a private lunch with a disreputable corporate lobbyist, but they ignored documented claims that he had covered up the killing of hundreds of American POWs. These allegations were serious enough and sufficiently documented to warrant national attention—yet they received none.

All of this might seem unimaginable except that it falls into a strong pattern of the press avoiding stories of overwhelming importance. Consider how many of the national disasters of the past few years have been caused by the unwillingness of our major media to question official truths or the widespread beliefs of our elites. The Iraq “cake-walk” to eliminate Saddam's WMDs, the nationwide housing bubble, and the Madoff swindle might have been prevented or would never have reached such massive proportions if reporters and editors had been willing to investigate and present claims contrary to the soothing blandishments of the powerful. Instead, it has become the norm for press outlets simply to repeat, with a few word substitutions, stories indistinguishable from those previously published by dozens of other press outlets, without ever examining any contrary evidence that might raise doubts about this perceived reality. Truth has come to mean the lies that everyone believes.

A couple of years ago, in one of my last exchanges with my late friend Lt. Gen. Bill Odom, who ran the

National Security Agency for President Ronald Reagan, we agreed a case could be made that today's major American media had become just as dishonest and unreliable as the old Soviet propaganda outlets of the late 1970s. At the time, we were discussing the coverage of our road to the Iraq War, but subsequent events have demonstrated that this national illness is far more advanced than either of us had suspected. Whether or not Schanberg is proven



correct, the shameful cowardice of our mainstream media is already proven by the wall of silence surrounding his work.

In an attempt to breach that wall, we present Schanberg's account of how his remarkable story was buried, as well as his explosive original article. *TAC* has also convened a symposium of critics drawn from military, political, and journalism backgrounds to explain how this report could have

failed to reach a mass audience. A small political magazine does not have the resources to investigate the detailed evidence of Schanberg's case, but we can hold a mirror up to America's major media and force them to see what stories they now regard as completely non-newsworthy.

And if Schanberg's claims are indeed correct, they reveal the lethal consequences of America's overweening national pride. After all, his history is a simple one. Following the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, the Vietnamese refused to return their French POWs unless Paris agreed to pay financial compensation for the war. The

French leaders paid the money and got their men back. Similarly, the Vietnamese refused to return their American POWs unless the U.S. government agreed to pay reparations. Nixon signed a document promising to do exactly that, but the Vietnamese, being cautious, kept many of the POWs back until the money was delivered. Then

Congress refused to authorize the funds because “America doesn't lose wars.” Nixon and later U.S. leaders never acknowledged the fate of these captives lest the American people become outraged. And as the years and decades went by, and various schemes to ransom or rescue the POWs were considered and rejected, their continued existence became a major liability to numerous powerful political figures, whose reputations would have been destroyed if any of the prisoners ever returned and told his story to the American people. So none of them ever came home. ■

Ron Unz is publisher of The American Conservative.

Silent Treatment

My four-decade fight to report the truth

By Sydney Schanberg

FROM THE BEGINNING, nearly 40 years ago, the evidence was in plain sight. For reasons unexplained, however, the mainstream press did not acknowledge it and has continued to ignore it to this day.

I'm referring to the evidence that North Vietnam—after the peace treaty had been signed on Jan. 27, 1973 in Paris—held back hundreds of American prisoners, keeping them as bargaining chips to ensure getting Washington's promised \$3.25 billion in war reparations. The funds were never delivered, and the prisoners were never released. Both sides insisted to their people and the world that all POWs had been returned, challenging the voluminous body of facts to the contrary.

But behind the scenes, where the press did not go then or now, President Nixon accused Hanoi of not returning a multitude of prisoners. In a private message on Feb. 2, 1973, Nixon said U.S. records showed 317 prisoners in Laos alone. "It is inconceivable," he wrote, "that only 10 of these men" were being returned.

Hanoi stonewalled and never added any men to its prisoner list. Yet just two months later, Nixon did an about-face and claimed proudly on national television, "all of our American POWs are on their way home." He had to know he was telling a terrible lie.

There were occasional times when the press detoured from its pattern of disinterest. Early in 1973, for instance, the *New York Times* published a front-

page story that described how taken aback the intelligence community was by the tiny number of prisoners being released from Laos. But neither the *Times* nor any other major news organization followed up with a serious investigation.

I take no pleasure in criticizing my profession. But in a sense, the press too abandoned the POWs. By its silence, the news community enabled Washington to cover up the scandal—though scandal is too mild a word for it. I believe it is a national shame.

I need to pause here to praise the one shining example in the national press. That would be *Newsday*, the only major newspaper that took on the POW story without blinking. During my decade there as a columnist, I started doing serious research and writing about the POW cover-up. In one 15-month period, I wrote 36 columns and a four-part, page-one series, most of them investigative pieces describing the underbelly of the cover-up. The series involved a search in Vietnam for evidence about the case of one downed pilot who never returned. *Newsday* is one of the handful of newspapers where investigative journalism in the modern era was born. To their great credit, *Newsday* and Tony Marro, its editor at the time, never hesitated to dig into the story.

People sometimes ask why I keep coming back to the POW story. I don't have a one-sentence answer. My mentors at the *New York Times* taught me

the importance of staying with a story. If you keep peeling back the layers, you may get to its core, which is the goal. It has worked for me. Skimming the surface of stories doesn't get reporter or reader very far.

Some apologists in the press point out that most Americans, not just the press, ran away from the Vietnam War after it ended. Our nation had lost a foreign war for the first time in its history. Americans were divided, ashamed, angry. There were no ticker-tape parades for the returning soldiers. Many at the Pentagon and in other government circles were blaming the press for writing critically about the war. But whatever heat the press gets from critics, running away from an important story is not the answer.

Apologists also cite differing social classes. They point out that for roughly the last four decades, since the expiration of the draft, reporters have generally come from college-educated, privileged backgrounds, and the volunteer Army became an entity largely composed of young men seeking to climb out of low-income roots to a better life. So, this theory goes, reporters don't feel much connection with the military.

That's a foolish excuse for ignoring the world of soldiers. (Full disclosure: After college, I served two years in the Army during the Cold War, posted in Germany.) Every reporter, man or woman, should be mature enough to comprehend the responsibilities of

the military and relate to its difficulties. It can't be too hard to imagine the lives of the prisoners who were never returned to their families. The government had told these soldiers that if they were wounded or captured, it would do everything in its power to save and heal them.

Well, sometimes that isn't the whole truth. Maybe their platoon buddies would do everything possible, but governments have multiple agendas. Nixon was desperate to get out of the Vietnam War, the albatross that had ended the political career of his predecessor, Lyndon Johnson. Also, the Watergate scandal was creeping up on him. Maybe Nixon thought he might be able somehow to bring those men home later by other means. Maybe. But it didn't happen. Both governments had sworn there were no POWs left behind, and with each passing year those enormous lies became more embedded in stone. They have now held sway across eight presidencies.

A hypothetical question: what would happen if a president decided to break ranks with the POW secrecy and ordered the immediate declassification of those hidden documents that would break the story wide open? The press has never fought to unseal them, and Sen. John McCain has spent a good chunk of his legislative career doing the Pentagon's bidding and pushing through the bills that keep those documents buried. (In all those profiles of McCain written by the national press as he campaigned twice for the presidency, I could not find a paragraph that mentioned these legislative activities.)

But back to the question of what would happen if a president suddenly brought those hidden documents into the light. My guess would be that hell could break loose. Some people might go to jail for violating the public

trust and their oaths of office. There's no statute of limitations on crimes like murder, and most of those abandoned prisoners are probably no longer alive. Those who began and continued the cover-up were surely accomplices in their deaths. At the very least, laws affecting the military would be rewritten. And the reputations of the people who played the largest roles would crumble all over the country—people such as Henry Kissinger, John McCain, John Kerry, and Dick Cheney, plus many others, including Pentagon chiefs, national security advisers, secretaries of state, intelligence chiefs, and so on. Since this is probably all a daydream, may I say that perhaps it could be a cleansing of the temple—for a while at least, human nature being what it is.

In recent years, I have offered my POW stories to a long list of editors of leading newspapers, magazines, and significant websites that do original reporting. And when they decline my offerings, I have urged them to do their own POW investigation with their own staff under their own supervision.

The list of these news organizations includes the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York* magazine, *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Rolling Stone*, *Mother Jones*, *Vanity Fair*, *Salon*, *Slate*, *Talking Points Memo*, *ProPublica*, *Politico*, and others. To my knowledge, none have attempted or produced a piece.

Their explanations for avoiding the story have never rung true. I have chosen not to use the names of the editors or the texts of their rejection messages, which could embarrass some of them. This is not a personal difference, but a professional one. I have decided instead to summarize their comments.

Some said they didn't have enough

staff to do the story. Others said the story was "old"—even though we have never found out what happened to the missing prisoners. I sensed often that these news people were afraid—that the story was too hot for them to handle because it could cause too many repercussions. Aren't journalists supposed to look into difficult stories and the wrongdoings of important people? Aren't they also supposed to expect blowback?

I asked these editors about the mountain of hard evidence attesting to the existence of abandoned men. In particular, I asked about the witness evidence, the 1,600 firsthand live sightings of American prisoners after the war. Did these journalists believe that every last one of the 1,600 witnesses was lying or mistaken? Many of these Vietnamese witnesses were interrogated by U.S. intelligence officers. Many were given lie-detector tests. They passed. The interrogators' reports graded the bulk of the witnesses "credible." A few of the journalists I have nudged to go after the story acknowledged that their paper or magazine or TV network had "blind spots." But again and again, the vast majority have hemmed and hawed and said they had "doubts" about the POW information. Isn't doing the reporting the best way to confirm or dispel doubts?

I would run through the long gamut of known intelligence—official radio intercepts of prisoners being moved to and from labor camps in Laos, satellite photos, conversations overheard by Secret Service agents inside the White House, ransom offers from Hanoi through third parties, sworn public testimony by three U.S. defense secretaries who served during the Vietnam era that "men were left behind." The press wasn't and isn't interested.

And the evidence is still in plain sight. ■

This article originally appeared on the website of The Nation Institute, Sept. 18, 2008.

McCain and the POW Cover-Up

The “war hero” candidate buried information about POWs left behind in Vietnam.

By Sydney Schanberg

JOHN MCCAIN, who has risen to political prominence on his image as a Vietnam POW war hero, has, inexplicably, worked very hard to hide from the public stunning information about American prisoners in Vietnam who, unlike him, didn’t return home. Throughout his Senate career, McCain has quietly sponsored and pushed into federal law a set of prohibitions that keep the most revealing information about these men buried as classified documents. Thus the war hero who people would logically imagine as a determined crusader for the interests of POWs and their families became instead the strange champion of hiding the evidence and closing the books.

Almost as striking is the manner in which the mainstream press has shied from reporting the POW story and McCain’s role in it, even as the Republican Party has made McCain’s military service the focus of his presidential campaign. Reporters who had covered the Vietnam War turned their heads and walked in other directions. McCain doesn’t talk about the missing men, and the press never asks him about them.

The sum of the secrets McCain has sought to hide is not small. There exists a telling mass of official documents, radio intercepts, witness depositions, satellite photos of rescue symbols that pilots were trained to use, electronic messages from the ground containing the individual code numbers given to airmen, a rescue mission

by a special forces unit that was aborted twice by Washington—and even sworn testimony by two Defense secretaries that “men were left behind.” This imposing body of evidence suggests that a large number—the documents indicate probably hundreds—of the U.S. prisoners held by Vietnam were not returned when the peace treaty was signed in January 1973 and Hanoi released 591 men, among them Navy combat pilot John S. McCain.

Mass of Evidence

The Pentagon had been withholding significant information from POW families for years. What’s more, the Pentagon’s POW/MIA operation had been publicly shamed by internal whistleblowers and POW families for holding back documents as part of a policy of “debunking” POW intelligence even when the information was obviously credible.

The pressure from the families and Vietnam veterans finally forced the creation, in late 1991, of a Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs. The chairman was John Kerry. McCain, as a former POW, was its most pivotal member. In the end, the committee became part of the debunking machine.

One of the sharpest critics of the Pentagon’s performance was an insider, Air Force Lt. Gen. Eugene Tighe, who headed the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) during the 1970s.

He openly challenged the Pentagon’s position that no live prisoners existed, saying that the evidence proved otherwise. McCain was a bitter opponent of Tighe, who was eventually pushed into retirement.

Included in the evidence that McCain and his government allies suppressed or sought to discredit is a transcript of a senior North Vietnamese general’s briefing of the Hanoi politburo, discovered in Soviet archives by an American scholar in 1993. The briefing took place only four months before the 1973 peace accords. The general, Tran Van Quang, told the politburo members that Hanoi was holding 1,205 American prisoners but would keep many of them at war’s end as leverage to ensure getting war reparations from Washington.

Throughout the Paris negotiations, the North Vietnamese tied the prisoner issue tightly to the issue of reparations. They were adamant in refusing to deal with them separately. Finally, in a Feb. 2, 1973 formal letter to Hanoi’s premier, Pham Van Dong, Nixon pledged \$3.25 billion in “post-war reconstruction” aid “without any political conditions.” But he also attached to the letter a codicil that said the aid would be implemented by each party “in accordance with its own constitutional provisions.” That meant Congress would have to approve the appropriation, and Nixon and Kissinger knew well that Congress was in no mood to do so. The

North Vietnamese, whether or not they immediately understood the double-talk in the letter, remained skeptical about the reparations promise being honored—and it never was. Hanoi thus appears to have held back prisoners—just as it had done when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and withdrew their forces from Vietnam. In that case, France paid ransoms for prisoners and brought them home.

In a private briefing in 1992, high-level CIA officials told me that as the years passed and the ransom never came, it became more and more difficult for either government to admit that it knew from the start about the unacknowledged prisoners. Those prisoners had not only become useless as bargaining chips but also posed a risk to Hanoi's desire to be accepted into the international community. The CIA officials said their intelligence indicated strongly that the remaining men—those who had not died from illness or hard labor or torture—were eventually executed.

My own research, detailed below, has convinced me that it is not likely that more than a few—if any—are alive in captivity today. (That CIA briefing at the Agency's Langley, Virginia, headquarters was conducted "off the record," but because the evidence from my own reporting since then has brought me to the same conclusion, I felt there was no longer any point in not writing about the meeting.)

For many reasons, including the absence of a political constituency for the missing men other than their families and some veterans' groups, very few Americans are aware of the POW story and of McCain's role in keeping it out of public view and denying the existence of abandoned POWs. That is because McCain has hardly been alone in his campaign to hide the scandal.

The Arizona senator, now the Republican candidate for president, has actually been following the lead of every White House since Richard Nixon's, and thus of every CIA director, Pentagon chief, and national security adviser, not to mention Dick Cheney, who was George H.W. Bush's Defense secretary. Their biggest accomplice has been an indolent press, particularly in Washington.

McCain's Role

An early and critical McCain secrecy move involved 1990 legislation that started in the House of Representatives. A brief and simple document, it was called "the Truth Bill" and would have compelled complete transparency about prisoners and missing men. Its core sentence reads: "[The] head of each department or agency which holds or receives any records and information, including live-sighting reports, which have been correlated or possibly correlated to United States personnel listed as prisoner of war or missing in action from World War II, the Korean conflict and the Vietnam conflict, shall make available to the public all such records held or received by that department or agency."

Bitterly opposed by the Pentagon (and thus McCain), the bill went nowhere. Reintroduced the following year, it again disappeared. But a few months later, a new measure, known as "the McCain Bill," suddenly appeared. By creating a bureaucratic maze from which only a fraction of the documents could emerge—only records that revealed no POW secrets—it turned the Truth Bill on its head. The McCain bill became law in 1991 and remains so today. So crushing to transparency are its provisions that it actually spells out for the Pentagon and other agencies several rationales, scenarios, and justifications for not releasing any information at all—even about prisoners dis-

covered alive in captivity. Later that year, the Senate Select Committee was created, where Kerry and McCain ultimately worked together to bury evidence.

McCain was also instrumental in amending the Missing Service Personnel Act, which had been strengthened in 1995 by POW advocates to include criminal penalties, saying, "Any government official who knowingly and willfully withholds from the file of a missing person any information relating to the disappearance or whereabouts and status of a missing person shall be fined as provided in Title 18 or imprisoned not more than one year or both." A year later, in a closed House-Senate conference on an unrelated military bill, McCain, at the behest of the Pentagon, attached a crippling amendment to the act, stripping out its only enforcement teeth, the criminal penalties, and reducing the obligations of commanders in the field to speedily search for missing men and to report the incidents to the Pentagon.

About the relaxation of POW/MIA obligations on commanders in the field, a public McCain memo said, "This transfers the bureaucracy involved out of the [battle] field to Washington." He wrote that the original legislation, if left intact, "would accomplish nothing but create new jobs for lawyers and turn military commanders into clerks."

McCain argued that keeping the criminal penalties would have made it impossible for the Pentagon to find staffers willing to work on POW/MIA matters. That's an odd argument to make. Were staffers only "willing to work" if they were allowed to conceal POW records? By eviscerating the law, McCain gave his stamp of approval to the government policy of debunking the existence of live POWs.

McCain has insisted again and again that all the evidence—documents,

witnesses, satellite photos, two Pentagon chiefs' sworn testimony, aborted rescue missions, ransom offers apparently scorned—has been woven together by unscrupulous deceivers to create an insidious and unpatriotic myth. He calls it the “bizarre rantings of the MIA hobbyists.” He has regularly vilified those who keep trying to pry out classified documents as “hoaxers,” “charlatans,” “conspiracy theorists,” and “dime-store Rambos.”

Some of McCain's fellow captives at Hoa Lo prison in Hanoi didn't share his views about prisoners left behind. Before he died of leukemia in 1999, retired Col. Ted Guy, a highly admired POW and one of the most dogged resisters in the camps, wrote an angry open letter to the senator in an MIA newsletter—a response to McCain's stream of insults hurled at MIA activists. Guy wrote, “John, does this [the insults] include Senator Bob Smith [a New Hampshire Republican and activist on POW issues] and other concerned elected officials? Does this include the families of the missing where there is overwhelming evidence that their loved ones were ‘last known alive’? Does this include some of your fellow POWs?”

It's not clear whether the taped confession McCain gave to his captors to avoid further torture has played a role in his postwar behavior in the Senate. That confession was played endlessly over the prison loudspeaker system at Hoa Lo—to try to break down other prisoners—and was broadcast over Hanoi's state radio. Reportedly, he confessed to being a war criminal who had bombed civilian targets. The Pentagon has a copy of the confession but will not release it. Also, no outsider I know of has ever seen a non-redacted copy of the debriefing of McCain when he returned from captivity, which is classified but could be made public by McCain.

All humans have breaking points. Many men undergoing torture give confessions, often telling huge lies so their fakery will be understood by their comrades and their country. Few will fault them. But it was McCain who apparently felt he had disgraced himself and his military family. His father, John S. McCain II, was a highly regarded rear admiral then serving as commander of all U.S. forces in the Pacific. His grandfather was also a rear admiral.

In his bestselling 1999 autobiography, *Faith of My Fathers*, McCain says he felt bad throughout his captivity because he knew he was being treated more leniently than his fellow POWs, owing to his high-ranking father and thus his propaganda value. Other prisoners at Hoa Lo say his captors considered him a prize catch and called him the “Crown Prince,” something McCain acknowledges in the book.

Also in this memoir, McCain expresses guilt at having broken under torture and given the confession. “I felt faithless and couldn't control my despair,” he writes, revealing that he made two “feeble” attempts at suicide. (In later years, he said he tried to hang himself with his shirt and guards intervened.) Tellingly, he says he lived in “dread” that his father would find out about the confession. “I still wince,” he writes, “when I recall wondering if my father had heard of my disgrace.”

He says that when he returned home, he told his father about the confession, but “never discussed it at length”—and the admiral, who died in 1981, didn't indicate he had heard anything about it before. But he had. In the 1999 memoir, the senator writes, “I only recently learned that the tape ... had been broadcast outside the prison and had come to the attention of my father.”

Is McCain haunted by these memories? Does he suppress POW information because its surfacing would rekindle his feelings of shame? On this subject, all I have are questions.

Many stories have been written about McCain's explosive temper, so volcanic that colleagues are loath to speak openly about it. One veteran congressman who has observed him over the years asked for confidentiality and made this brief comment: “This is a man not at peace with himself.”

He was certainly far from calm on the Senate POW committee. He browbeat expert witnesses who came with information about unreturned POWs. Family members who have personally faced McCain and pressed him to end the secrecy also have been treated to his legendary temper. He has screamed at them, insulted them, brought women to tears. Mostly his responses to them have been versions of: How dare you question my patriotism? In 1996, he roughly pushed aside a group of POW family members who had waited outside a hearing room to appeal to him, including a mother in a wheelchair.

But even without answers to what may be hidden in the recesses of McCain's mind, one thing about the POW story is clear: if American prisoners were dishonored by being written off and left to die, that's something the American public ought to know about.

10 Key Pieces of Evidence That Men Were Left Behind

1. In Paris, where the Vietnam peace treaty was negotiated, the United States asked Hanoi for the list of American prisoners to be returned, fearing that Hanoi would hold some prisoners back. The North Vietnamese refused, saying they would produce the list only after the treaty was

signed. Nixon agreed with Kissinger that they had no leverage left, and Kissinger signed the accord on Jan. 27, 1973 without the prisoner list. When Hanoi produced its list of 591 prisoners the next day, U.S. intelligence agencies expressed shock at the low number. Their number was hundreds higher. The *New York Times* published a long, page-one story on Feb. 2, 1973 about the discrepancy, especially raising questions about the number of prisoners held in Laos, only nine of whom were being returned. The headline read, in part, "Laos POW List Shows 9 from U.S.—Document Disappointing to Washington as 311 Were Believed Missing." And the story, by John Finney, said that other Washington officials "believe the number of prisoners [in Laos] is probably substantially higher." The paper never followed up with any serious investigative reporting—nor did any other mainstream news organization.

2. Two Defense secretaries who served during the Vietnam War testified to the Senate POW committee in September 1992 that prisoners were not returned. James Schlesinger and Melvin Laird, both speaking at a public session and under oath, said they based their conclusions on strong intelligence data—letters, eyewitness reports, even direct radio contacts. Under questioning, Schlesinger chose his words carefully, understanding clearly the volatility of the issue: "I think that as of now that I can come to no other conclusion ... some were left behind." This ran counter to what President Nixon told the public in a nationally televised speech on March 29, 1973, when the repatriation of the 591 was in motion: "Tonight," Nixon said, "the day we have all worked and prayed for has finally come. For the first time in 12 years, no American military forces are in Vietnam. All our

American POWs are on their way home." Documents unearthed since then show that aides had already briefed Nixon about the contrary evidence.

Schlesinger was asked by the Senate committee for his explanation of why President Nixon would have made such a statement when he knew Hanoi was still holding prisoners. He replied, "One must assume that we had concluded that the bargaining position of the United States ... was quite weak. We were anxious to get our troops out and we were not going to roil the waters..." This testimony struck me as a bombshell. The *New York Times* appropriately reported it on page one but again there was no sustained follow-up by the *Times* or any other major paper or national news outlet.

3. Over the years, the DIA received more than 1,600 first-hand sightings of live American prisoners and nearly 14,000 second-hand reports. Many witnesses interrogated by CIA or Pentagon intelligence agents were deemed "credible" in the agents' reports. Some of the witnesses were given lie-detector tests and passed. Sources provided me with copies of these witness reports, which are impressive in their detail. A lot of the sightings described a secondary tier of prison camps many miles from Hanoi. Yet the DIA, after reviewing all these reports, concluded that they "do not constitute evidence" that men were alive.

4. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, listening stations picked up messages in which Laotian military personnel spoke about moving American prisoners from one labor camp to another. These listening posts were manned by Thai communications officers trained by the National Security Agency (NSA), which monitors sig-

nals worldwide. The NSA teams had moved out after the fall of Saigon in 1975 and passed the job to the Thai allies. But when the Thais turned these messages over to Washington, the intelligence community ruled that since the intercepts were made by a "third party"—namely Thailand—they could not be regarded as authentic. That's some Catch-22: the U.S. trained a third party to take over its role in monitoring signals about POWs, but because that third party did the monitoring, the messages weren't valid.

Here, from CIA files, is an example that clearly exposes the farce. On Dec. 27, 1980, a Thai military signal team picked up a message saying that prisoners were being moved out of Attapeu (in southern Laos) by aircraft "at 1230 hours." Three days later a message was sent from the CIA station in Bangkok to the CIA director's office in Langley. It read, in part: "The prisoners ... are now in the valley in permanent location (a prison camp at Nhommarath in Central Laos). They were transferred from Attapeu to work in various places ... POWs were formerly kept in caves and are very thin, dark and starving." Apparently the prisoners were real. But the transmission was declared "invalid" by Washington because the information came from a "third party" and thus could not be deemed credible.

5. A series of what appeared to be distress signals from Vietnam and Laos were captured by the government's satellite system in the late 1980s and early '90s. (Before that period, no search for such signals had been put in place.) Not a single one of these markings was ever deemed credible. To the layman's eye, the satellite photos, some of which I've seen, show markings on the ground that are identical to the signals that

American pilots had been specifically trained to use in their survival courses—such as certain letters, like X or K, drawn in a special way. Other markings were the secret four-digit authenticator numbers given to individual pilots. But time and again, the Pentagon, backed by the CIA, insisted that humans had not made these markings. What were they, then? “Shadows and vegetation,” the government said, insisting that the markings were merely normal topographical contours like saw-grass or rice-paddy divider walls. It was the automatic response—shadows and vegetation. On one occasion, a Pentagon photo expert refused to go along. It was a missing man’s name gouged into a field, he said, not trampled grass or paddy berms. His bosses responded by bringing in an outside contractor who found instead, yes, shadows and vegetation. This refrain led Bob Taylor, a highly regarded investigator on the Senate committee staff who had examined the photographic evidence, to comment to me: “If grass can spell out people’s names and secret digit codes, then I have a newfound respect for grass.”

6. On Nov. 11, 1992, Dolores Alfond, the sister of missing airman Capt. Victor Apodaca and chair of the National Alliance of Families, an organization of relatives of POW/MIAs, testified at one of the Senate committee’s public hearings. She asked for information about data the government had gathered from electronic devices used in a classified program known as PAVE SPIKE.

The devices were motion sensors, dropped by air, designed to pick up enemy troop movements. Shaped on one end like a spike with an electronic pod and antenna on top, they were designed to stick in the ground as they fell. Air Force planes would

drop them along the Ho Chi Minh trail and other supply routes. The devices, though primarily sensors, also had rescue capabilities. Someone on the ground—a downed airman or a prisoner on a labor gang—could manually enter data into the sensor. All data were regularly collected electronically by U.S. planes flying overhead. Alfond stated, without any challenge or contradiction by the committee, that in 1974, a year after the supposedly complete return of prisoners, the gathered data showed that a person or people had manually entered into the sensors—as U.S. pilots had been trained to do—no less than 20 authenticator numbers that corresponded exactly to the classified authenticator numbers of 20 U.S. POWs who were lost in Laos. Alfond added, according to the transcript, “This PAVE SPIKE intelligence is seamless, but the committee has not discussed it or released what it knows about PAVE SPIKE.”

McCain attended that committee hearing specifically to confront Alfond because of her criticism of the panel’s work. He bellowed and berated her for quite a while. His face turning anger-pink, he accused her of “denigrating” his “patriotism.” The bullying had its effect—she began to cry.

After a pause Alfond recovered and tried to respond to his scorching tirade, but McCain simply turned away and stormed out of the room. The PAVE SPIKE file has never been declassified. We still don’t know anything about those 20 POWs.

7. As previously mentioned, in April 1993 in a Moscow archive, a researcher from Harvard, Stephen Morris, unearthed and made public the transcript of a briefing that General Tran Van Quang gave to the Hanoi politburo four months before the signing of the Paris peace accords in 1973.

In the transcript, General Quang told the Hanoi politburo that 1,205 U.S. prisoners were being held. Quang said that many of the prisoners would be held back from Washington after the accords as bargaining chips for war reparations. General Quang’s report added: “This is a big number. Officially, until now, we published a list of only 368 prisoners of war. The rest we have not revealed. The government of the USA knows this well, but it does not know the exact number ... and can only make guesses based on its losses. That is why we are keeping the number of prisoners of war secret, in accordance with the politburo’s instructions.” The report then went on to explain in clear and specific language that a large number would be kept back to ensure reparations.

The reaction to the document was immediate. After two decades of denying it had kept any prisoners, Hanoi responded to the revelation by calling the transcript a fabrication.

Similarly, Washington—which had over the same two decades refused to recant Nixon’s declaration that all the prisoners had been returned—also shifted into denial mode. The Pentagon issued a statement saying the document “is replete with errors, omissions and propaganda that seriously damage its credibility,” and that the numbers were “inconsistent with our own accounting.”

Neither American nor Vietnamese officials offered any rationale for who would plant a forged document in the Soviet archives and why they would do so. Certainly neither Washington nor Moscow—closely allied with Hanoi—would have any motive, since the contents were embarrassing to all parties, and since both the United States and Vietnam had consistently denied the existence of unreturned prisoners. The Russian archivists simply said the document was “authentic.”

8. In his 2002 book, *Inside Delta Force*, retired Command Sgt. Maj. Eric Haney described how in 1981 his special forces unit, after rigorous training for a POW rescue mission, had the mission suddenly aborted, revived a year later, and again abruptly aborted. Haney writes that this abandonment of captured soldiers ate at him for years and left him disillusioned about his government's vows to leave no men behind. "Years later, I spoke at length with a former highly placed member of the North Vietnamese diplomatic corps, and this person asked me point-blank: 'Why did the Americans never attempt to recover their remaining POWs after the conclusion of the war?'" Haney writes. He continued, saying that he came to believe senior government officials had called off those missions in 1981 and 1982. (His account is on pages 314 to 321 of my paperback copy of the book.)

9. There is also evidence that in the first months of Ronald Reagan's presidency in 1981, the White House received a ransom proposal for a number of POWs being held by Hanoi in Indochina. The offer, which was passed to Washington from an official of a third country, was apparently discussed at a meeting in the Roosevelt Room attended by Reagan, Vice President Bush, CIA director William Casey, and National Security Adviser Richard Allen. Allen confirmed the offer in sworn testimony to the Senate POW committee on June 23, 1992.

Allen was allowed to testify behind closed doors and no information was released. But a *San Diego Union-Tribune* reporter, Robert Caldwell, obtained the portion relating to the ransom offer and reported on it. The ransom request was for \$4 billion, Allen testified. He said he told Reagan that "it would be worth the president's

going along and let's have the negotiation." When his testimony appeared in the *Union-Tribune*, Allen quickly wrote a letter to the panel, this time not under oath, recanting the ransom story and claiming his memory had played tricks on him. His new version was that some POW activists had asked him about such an offer in a meeting that took place in 1986, when he was no longer in government. "It appears," he said in the letter, "that there never was a 1981 meeting about the return of POW/MIAs for \$4 billion."

But the episode didn't end there. A Treasury agent on Secret Service duty in the White House, John Syphrit, came forward to say he had overheard part of the ransom conversation in the Roosevelt Room in 1981, when the offer was discussed by Reagan, Bush, Casey, Allen, and other cabinet officials.

Syphrit, a veteran of the Vietnam War, told the committee he was willing to testify, but they would have to subpoena him. Treasury opposed his appearance, arguing that voluntary testimony would violate the trust between the Secret Service and those it protects. It was clear that coming in on his own could cost Syphrit his career. The committee voted 7 to 4 not to subpoena him.

In the committee's final report, dated Jan. 13, 1993 (on page 284), the panel not only chastised Syphrit for his failure to testify without a subpoena ("The committee regrets that the Secret Service agent was unwilling ..."), but noted that since Allen had recanted his testimony about the Roosevelt Room briefing, Syphrit's testimony would have been "at best, uncorroborated by the testimony of any other witness." The committee omitted any mention that it had made a decision not to ask the other two surviving witnesses, Bush and Reagan, to give testimony under oath. (Casey had died.)

10. In 1990, Col. Millard Peck, a decorated infantry veteran of Vietnam then working at the DIA as chief of the Asia Division for Current Intelligence, asked for the job of chief of the DIA's Special Office for Prisoners of War and Missing in Action. His reason for seeking the transfer, which was not a promotion, was that he had heard from officials throughout the Pentagon that the POW/MIA office had been turned into a waste-disposal unit for getting rid of unwanted evidence about live prisoners—a "black hole," these officials called it.

Peck explained all this in his telling resignation letter of Feb. 12, 1991, eight months after he had taken the job. He said he viewed it as "sort of a holy crusade" to restore the integrity of the office but was defeated by the Pentagon machine. The four-page, single-spaced letter was scathing, describing the putative search for missing men as "a cover-up."

Peck charged that, at its top echelons, the Pentagon had embraced a "mind-set to debunk" all evidence of prisoners left behind. "That national leaders continue to address the prisoner of war and missing in action issue as the 'highest national priority,' is a travesty," he wrote. "The entire charade does not appear to be an honest effort, and may never have been. ... Practically all analysis is directed to finding fault with the source. Rarely has there been any effective, active follow through on any of the sightings, nor is there a responsive 'action arm' to routinely and aggressively pursue leads."

"I became painfully aware," his letter continued, "that I was not really in charge of my own office, but was merely a figurehead or whipping boy for a larger and totally Machiavellian group of players outside of DIA ... I feel strongly that this issue is being manipulated and controlled at a

higher level, not with the goal of resolving it, but more to obfuscate the question of live prisoners and give the illusion of progress through hyperactivity." He named no names but said these players are "unscrupulous people in the Government or associated with the Government" who "have maintained their distance and remained hidden in the shadows, while using the [POW] Office as a 'toxic waste dump' to bury the whole 'mess' out of sight." Peck added that "military officers ... who in some manner have 'rocked the boat' [have] quickly come to grief."

Peck concluded, "From what I have witnessed, it appears that any soldier left in Vietnam, even inadvertently, was, in fact, abandoned years ago, and that the farce that is being played is no more than political leg-gerdemain done with 'smoke and mirrors' to stall the issue until it dies a natural death."

The disillusioned colonel not only resigned but asked to be retired immediately from active military service. The press never followed up.

My Pursuit of the Story

I covered the war in Cambodia and Vietnam, but came to the POW information only slowly afterward, when military officers I knew from that conflict began coming to me with maps and POW sightings and depositions by Vietnamese witnesses.

I was then city editor of the *New York Times*, no longer involved in foreign or national stories, so I took the data to the appropriate desks and suggested it was material worth pursuing. There were no takers. Some years later, in 1991, when I was an op-ed columnist at *Newsday*, the aforementioned special Senate committee was formed to probe the POW issue. I saw this as an opening and immersed myself in the reporting.

At *Newsday*, I wrote 36 columns over a two-year period, as well as a four-part series on a trip I took to North Vietnam to report on what happened to one missing pilot who was shot down over the Ho Chi Minh trail and captured when he parachuted down. After *Newsday*, I wrote thousands more words on the subject for other outlets. Some of the pieces were about McCain's key role.

Though I wrote on many subjects for *Life*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Washington Monthly*, my POW articles appeared in *Penthouse*, the *Village Voice*, and *APBnews.com*. Mainstream publications just weren't interested. Their disinterest was part of what motivated me, and I became one of a very short list of journalists who considered the story important.

Serving in the Army in Germany during the Cold War and witnessing combat firsthand as a reporter in India and Indochina led me to have great respect for those who fight for their country. To my mind, we dishonored U.S. troops when our government failed to bring them home from Vietnam after the 591 others were released—and then claimed they didn't exist. And politicians dishonor themselves when they pay lip service to the bravery and sacrifice of soldiers only to leave untold numbers behind, rationalizing to themselves that it's merely one of the unfortunate costs of war.

John McCain—now campaigning for the White House as a war hero, maverick, and straight shooter—owes the voters some explanations. The press were long ago wooed and won by McCain's seeming openness, Lone Ranger pose, and self-deprecating humor, which may partly explain their ignoring his record on POWs. In the numerous, lengthy McCain profiles that have appeared of late in papers like the *New York Times*, the *Wash-*

ington Post, and the *Wall Street Journal*, I may have missed a clause or a sentence along the way, but I have not found a single mention of his role in burying information about POWs. Television and radio news programs have been similarly silent.

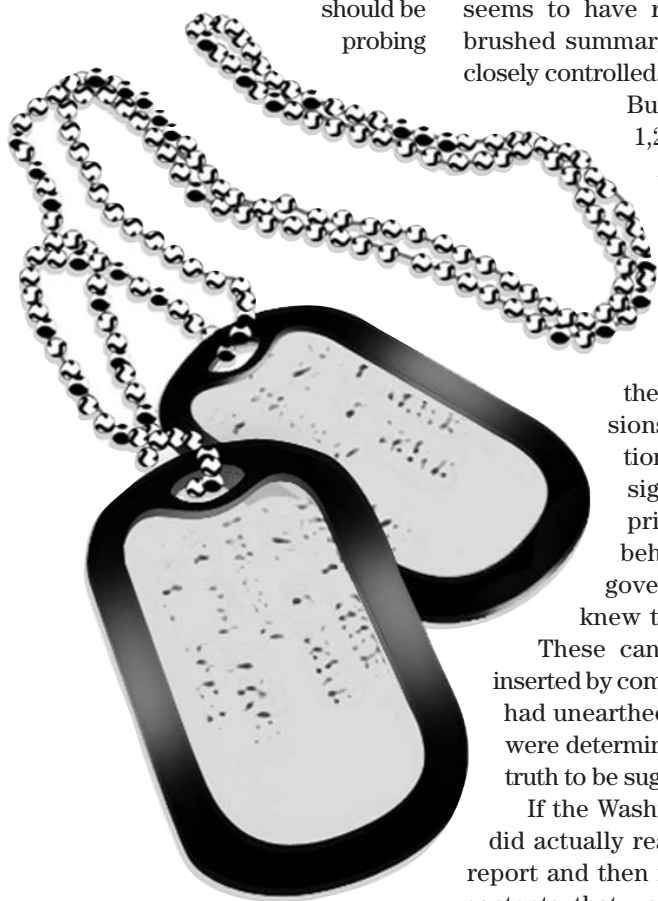
Reporters simply never ask him about it. They didn't when he ran unsuccessfully for the Republican nomination in 2000. They haven't now, despite the fact that we're in the midst of another war—a war he supports and one that has echoes of Vietnam. The only explanation McCain has ever offered for his leadership on legislation that seals POW files is that he believes the release of such information would only stir up fresh grief for the families of those who were never accounted for in Vietnam. Of the scores of POW families I've met over the years, only a few have said they want the books closed without knowing what happened to their men. All the rest say that not knowing is exactly what grieves them.

Isn't it possible that what really worries those intent on keeping the POW documents buried is the public disgust that the contents of those files would generate?

How the Senate Committee Perpetuated the Debunking

In its early months, the Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs gave the appearance of being committed to finding out the truth about the MIAs. As time went on, however, it became clear that they were cooperating in every way with the Pentagon and CIA, who often seemed to be calling the shots, even setting the agendas for certain key hearings. Both agencies held back the most important POW files. Dick Cheney was the Pentagon chief then; Robert Gates, now the Pentagon chief, was the CIA director.

Further, the committee failed to question any living president. Reagan declined to answer questions; the committee didn't contest his refusal. Nixon was given a pass. George H.W. Bush, the sitting president, whose prints were all over this issue from his days as CIA chief in the 1970s, was never even approached. Troubled by these signs, several committee staffers began asking why the agencies they should be probing



had been turned into committee partners and decision makers. Memos to that effect were circulated. The staff made the following finding, using intelligence reports marked "credible" that covered POW sightings through 1989: "There can be no doubt that POWs were alive ... as late as 1989." That finding was never released. Eventually, much of the staff was in rebellion.

This internecine struggle continued right up to the committee's last official act—the issuance of its final report. The Executive Summary, which comprised the first 43 pages, was essentially a whitewash, saying that only "a small number" of POWs could have been left behind in 1973 and that there was little likelihood that any prisoners could still be alive. The Washington press corps, judging from its coverage, seems to have read only this air-brushed summary, which had been closely controlled.

But the rest of the 1,221-page *Report on POW/MIAs* was quite different. Sprinkled throughout are pieces of hard evidence that directly contradict the summary's conclusions. This documentation established that a significant number of prisoners were left behind—and that top government officials knew this from the start.

These candid findings were inserted by committee staffers who had unearthed the evidence and were determined not to allow the truth to be sugar-coated.

If the Washington press corps did actually read the body of the report and then failed to report its contents, that would be a scandal of its own. The press would then have knowingly ignored the steady stream of findings in the body of the report that refuted the summary and indicated that the number of abandoned men was not small but considerable. The report gave no figures but estimates from various branches of the intelligence community ranged up to 600. The lowest estimate was 150.

Highlights of the report that undermine the benign conclusions of the Executive Summary:

- **Pages 207-209:** These three pages contain revelations of what appear to be either massive intelligence failures or bad intentions—or both. The report says that until the committee brought up the subject in 1992, no branch of the intelligence community that dealt with analysis of satellite and lower-altitude photos had ever been informed of the specific distress signals U.S. personnel were trained to use in the Vietnam War, nor had they ever been tasked to look for any such signals at all from possible prisoners on the ground.

The committee decided, however, not to seek a review of old photography, saying it "would cause the expenditure of large amounts of manpower and money with no expectation of success." It might also have turned up lots of distress-signal numbers that nobody in the government was looking for from 1973 to 1991, when the committee opened shop. That would have made it impossible for the committee to write the Executive Summary it seemed determined to write.

The failure gets worse. The committee also discovered that the DIA, which kept the lists of authenticator numbers for pilots and other personnel, could not "locate" the lists of these codes for Army, Navy, or Marine pilots. They had lost or destroyed the records. The Air Force list was the only one intact, as it had been preserved by a different intelligence branch.

The report concluded, "In theory, therefore, if a POW still living in captivity [today], were to attempt to communicate by ground signal, smuggling out a note or by whatever means possible, and he used his personal authenticator number to confirm his identity, the U.S. government would be unable

to provide such confirmation, if his number happened to be among those numbers DIA cannot locate.”

It’s worth remembering that throughout the period when this intelligence disaster occurred—from the moment the treaty was signed in 1973 until 1991—the White House told the public that it had given the search for POWs and POW information the “highest national priority.”

● **Page 13:** Even in the Executive Summary, the report acknowledges the existence of clear intelligence, made known to government officials early on, that important numbers of captured U.S. POWs were not on Hanoi’s repatriation list. After Hanoi released its list (showing only ten names from Laos—nine military men and one civilian), President Nixon sent a message on Feb. 2, 1973 to Hanoi’s Prime Minister Pham Van Dong saying, “U.S. records show there are 317 American military men unaccounted for in Laos and it is inconceivable that only ten of these men would be held prisoner in Laos.”

Nixon was right. It was inconceivable. Then why did the president, less than two months later, on March 29, 1973, announce on national television that “all of our American POWs are on their way home”?

On April 13, 1973, just after all 591 men on Hanoi’s official list had returned to American soil, the Pentagon got into step with the president and announced that there was no evidence of any further live prisoners in Indochina (this is on page 248).

● **Page 91:** A lengthy footnote provides more confirmation of the White House’s knowledge of abandoned

POWs. The footnote reads, “In a telephone conversation with Select Committee Vice-Chairman Bob Smith on December 29, 1992, Dr. Kissinger said that he had informed President Nixon during the 60-day period after the peace agreement was signed that U.S. intelligence officials believed that the list of prisoners captured in Laos was incomplete. According to Dr. Kissinger, the President responded by directing that the exchange of prisoners on the lists go forward, but added that a failure to account for the additional prisoners after Operation Homecoming would lead to a resumption of bombing. Dr. Kissinger said that the President was later unwilling to carry through on this threat.”

When Kissinger learned of the footnote while the final editing of the committee report was in progress, he and his lawyers lobbied fiercely through two Republican allies on the panel—one of them was John McCain—to get the footnote expunged. The effort failed. The footnote stayed intact.

● **Pages 85-86:** The committee report quotes Kissinger from his memoirs, writing solely in reference to prisoners in Laos: “We knew of at least 80 instances in which an American serviceman had been captured alive and subsequently disappeared. The evidence consisted either of voice communications from the ground in advance of capture or photographs and names published by the Communists. Yet none of these men was on the list of POWs handed over after the Agreement.”

Then why did he swear under oath to the committee in 1992 that he never had any information that specific, named soldiers were captured alive and hadn’t been returned by Vietnam?

● **Page 89:** In the middle of the prisoner repatriation and U.S. troop-withdrawal process agreed to in the treaty, when it became clear that Hanoi was not releasing everyone it held, a furious chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Adm. Thomas Moorer, issued an order halting the troop withdrawal until Hanoi complied with the agreement. He cited in particular the known prisoners in Laos. The order was retracted by President Nixon the next day. In 1992, Moorer, by then retired, testified under oath to the committee that his order had received the approval of the president, the national security adviser, and the secretary of Defense. Nixon, however, in a letter to the committee, wrote, “I do not recall directing Admiral Moorer to send this cable.”

The report did not include the following information: behind closed doors, a senior intelligence officer had testified to the POW committee that when Moorer’s order was rescinded, the angry admiral sent a “back-channel” message to other key military commanders telling them that Washington was abandoning known live prisoners. “Nixon and Kissinger are at it again,” he wrote. “SecDef and SecState have been cut out of the loop.” In 1973, the witness was working in the office that processed this message. His name and his testimony are still classified. A source present for the testimony provided me with this information and also reported that in that same time period, Moorer had stormed into Defense Secretary Schlesinger’s office and, pounding on his desk, yelled: “The bastards have still got our men.” Schlesinger, in his own testimony to the committee a few months later, was asked about—and corroborated—this account.

● **Pages 95-96:** In early April 1973, Deputy Defense Secretary William Clements “summoned” Dr. Roger Shields, then head of the Pentagon’s

To view documents cited here, visit:
www.amconmag.com/blog/schanberg-sources/

POW/MIA Task Force, to his office to work out “a new public formulation” of the POW issue; now that the White House had declared all prisoners to have been returned, a new spin was needed. Shields, under oath, described the meeting to the committee. He said Clements told him, “All the American POWs are dead.” Shields said he replied: “You can’t say that.” Clements shot back: “You didn’t hear me. They are all dead.” Shields testified that at that moment he thought he was going to be fired, but he escaped from his boss’s office still holding his job.

● **Pages 97-98:** A couple of days later, on April 11, 1973, a day before Shields was to hold a Pentagon press conference on POWs, he and Gen. Brent Scowcroft, then the deputy national security adviser, went to the Oval Office to discuss the “new public formulation” and its presentation with President Nixon.

The next day, reporters right off asked Shields about missing POWs. Shields fudged his answers. He said, “We have no indications at this time that there are any Americans alive in Indochina.” But he went on to say that there had not been “a complete accounting” of those lost in Laos and that the Pentagon would press on to account for the missing—a seeming acknowledgement that some Americans were still alive and unaccounted for.

The press, however, seized on Shields’s denials. One headline read, “POW Unit Boss: No Living GIs Left in Indochina.”

● **Page 97:** The POW committee, knowing that Nixon taped all his meetings in the Oval Office, sought the tape of that April 11, 1973 Nixon-Shields-Scowcroft meeting to find out what Nixon had been told and what he had said about the evidence of

POWs still in Indochina. The committee also knew there had been other White House meetings that centered on intelligence about live POWs. A footnote on page 97 states that Nixon’s lawyers said they would provide access to the April 11 tape “only if the Committee agreed not to seek any other White House recordings from this time period.” The footnote says that the committee rejected these terms and got nothing. The committee never made public this request for Nixon tapes until the brief footnote in its 1993 report.

McCain’s Catch-22

None of this compelling evidence in the committee’s full report dislodged McCain from his contention that the whole POW issue was a concoction by deluded purveyors of a “conspiracy theory.” But an honest review of the full report, combined with the other documentary evidence, tells the story of a frustrated and angry president, and his national security adviser, furious at being thwarted at the peace table by a small, much less powerful country that refused to bow to Washington’s terms. That president seems to have swallowed hard and accepted a treaty that left probably hundreds of American prisoners in Hanoi’s hands, to be used as bargaining chips for reparations.

Maybe Nixon and Kissinger told themselves that they could get the prisoners home after some time had passed. But perhaps it proved too hard to undo a lie as big as this one. Washington said no prisoners were left behind, and Hanoi swore it had returned all of them. How could either side later admit it had lied? Time went by and as neither side budged, telling the truth became even more difficult and remote. The public would realize that Washington knew of the abandoned men all along. The

truth, after men had been languishing in foul prison cells, could get people impeached or thrown in jail.

Which brings us to today, when the Republican candidate for president is the contemporary politician most responsible for keeping the truth about this matter hidden. Yet he says he’s the right man to be the commander in chief, and his credibility in making this claim is largely based on his image as a POW hero.

On page 468 of the 1,221-page report, McCain parsed his POW position oddly, “We found no compelling evidence to prove that Americans are alive in captivity today. There is some evidence—though no proof—to suggest only the possibility that a few Americans may have been kept behind after the end of America’s military involvement in Vietnam.”

“Evidence though no proof.” Clearly, no one could meet McCain’s standard of proof as long as he is leading a government crusade to keep the truth buried.

To this reporter, this sounds like a significant story and a long overdue opportunity for the press to finally dig into the archives to set the historical record straight—and even pose some direct questions to the candidate. ■

Sydney Schanberg has been a journalist for nearly 50 years. The 1984 movie “The Killing Fields,” which won several Academy Awards, was based on his book The Death and Life of Dith Pran. In 1975, Schanberg was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for international reporting “at great risk.” He is also the recipient of two George Polk awards, two Overseas Press Club awards, and the Sigma Delta Chi prize for distinguished journalism. His latest book is Beyond the Killing Fields (www.beyondthekillingfields.com). This piece is reprinted with permission from The Nation Institute.

Peter Richardson How could Sydney Schanberg's story on Vietnam POWs appear in *The Nation* and then vanish in the mainstream media? A clue, I think, appears in the memoir of former *Nation* editor Carey McWilliams.

In 1960, McWilliams learned that *La Hora*, a leading Guatemalan newspaper, reported that the CIA was training guerrillas there to invade Cuba. *The Nation* picked up the story in January 1961, the same month President Kennedy entered office. A few days later, the *New York Times* acknowledged the existence of the secret camp, but said its purpose was to train Guatemalan forces to repel a Cuban invasion.

That April, the Bay of Pigs fiasco confirmed *The Nation's* account. Soon after the failed attempt to oust Castro, President Kennedy told a *Times* editor that his paper's story was a premature disclosure of security information. When the editor reminded Kennedy that similar reports had already appeared in *La Hora* and *The Nation*, Kennedy replied, "But it was not news until it appeared in the *Times*."

Kennedy's simple statement described a complex social reality. By running a story, the *Times* turned mere information into news. That bit of magic has what language philosophers call a performative quality, much like a priest pronouncing a couple husband and wife. The priest isn't reporting a marriage; he's creating one. If a layperson utters the same words, nothing happens.

Despite profound changes in the media ecology since then, President Kennedy's point is still valid. Information is more accessible than ever, but for any news story to reach a significant fraction of the American population, a major media outlet must disseminate it.

When it comes to generating those big stories, however, major news organizations have a mixed record. Consider two recent examples, arguably the most consequential events of the last decade: the housing bubble and the invasion of Iraq. In both cases, the big outfits had world enough and time to expose official negligence, recklessness, and mendacity. If they had, we might have avoided the staggering human costs of recession and war. Yet even when Big Media admitted their mistakes, the statements were dodgy. The clear suggestion was that everyone had missed those stories, but in both cases, experts were shouting the truth from the rooftops.

When smaller media players generate big stories, a major outlet's decision to run them often hinges on the source's institutional savvy and showmanship. In the 1960s, for example, *Ramparts* magazine broke a handful of blockbuster stories about Vietnam and the CIA. Adam

Hochschild, a *Ramparts* staff member who later co-founded *Mother Jones*, described the San Francisco muckraker's formula: "Find an exposé the major newspapers are afraid to touch, publish it with a big enough splash so they can't afford to ignore it ... and then publicize it in a way that plays the press off against each other."

If the formula is simple, its skillful execution is rare. *Ramparts* managed it by offering exclusives on its biggest stories to the *New York Times*, an arrangement that worked for both organizations. *Ramparts* reached audiences far beyond its own readership, and the *Times* beat its direct competitors to the punch.

But *Ramparts'* success was short-lived. Investigative reporting is expensive, and *Ramparts'* ad revenues were weak—the norm for political magazines Left or Right. After filing for bankruptcy and reorganizing in 1969, *Ramparts* never regained its power to rock the establishment. Facing stiff competition from other organizations, some created in its own image, *Ramparts* declined steadily before closing for good in 1975. Operating at a lower altitude, *The Nation* carried on, mixing investigative pieces with budget-friendly opinion and analysis.

Today's business climate is much tougher for news outlets large and small. In part that's because Americans seem to accept the idea that news organizations, whose product is a public good, should perish if they need public support to stay alive. That idea hasn't prevailed in other industrial democracies, or even in earlier periods of U.S. history. In the 19th century, for example, the U.S. Postal Service delivered newspapers for free—the equivalent of a \$30 billion subsidy in today's dollars. (Our subsidies for public broadcasting now come to about \$400 million.) The result was more voices, more diversity, and a smaller proportion of stories generated by the very institutions the media should be scrutinizing.

As for investigative journalism, the most expensive and therefore most vulnerable form of reporting, its best chance for survival is a media ecology that includes savvy fringe players and larger outlets—not necessarily newspapers—that can be played off each other. As Schanberg's POW story demonstrates, even this arrangement isn't foolproof. But without big players, most stories will never reach a large audience, and without small ones, too many important stories will never be told at all. ■

Peter Richardson is the author of A Bomb in Every Issue: How the Short, Unruly Life of Ramparts Magazine Changed America (2009) and American Prophet: The Life and Work of Carey McWilliams (2005).

Gareth Porter

Sydney Schanberg has an illustrious journalistic career going back to the Vietnam War. But in peddling the story of an alleged high-level cover-up of U.S. prisoners of war said to have been left behind after the war, he has inexplicably swallowed one of history's spectacular frauds. Schanberg's article incorporates deceptions that have built this political myth, which has been successfully exploited by ambitious and unprincipled figures for decades.

Schanberg failed to do what any responsible journalist investigating the issue would have done, which is to do enough research to verify the outrageous claims made by those who have advocated this conspiratorial view. He substituted personal conviction for careful spade work.

The centerpiece of Schanberg's story is the famous document from the Soviet archives, in which a senior North Vietnamese general named Tran Van Quang allegedly said in 1972 that there were 1,205 American prisoners of war, not the 591 handed over after the war. Schanberg informs readers—not once but three times—that Quang told the politburo that Hanoi “would keep many of them at war's end as leverage to ensure getting war reparations from Washington.”

Many of the document's figures, such as the numbers of officers of different U.S. ranks held, are so seriously inaccurate as to bring its authenticity into question. For example, it uses the term “prisoners of war” to refer to the U.S. servicemen held—a designation that the Vietnamese Communists never employed—and combines the powerful South Vietnamese corps commander Gen. Ngo Dzu and the powerless peace candidate Truong Dinh Dzu into a single composite political figure.

But it doesn't even matter if the document is authentic or not because, contrary to Schanberg's claims, it says nothing at all about holding POWs after the war. Instead, it simply states, accurately, the public stance of North Vietnam on the issue of returning prisoners as of September 1972, which was to refuse to agree to the release of U.S. prisoners in return for an (incomplete) U.S. military withdrawal, as was being proposed by the Nixon administration. Rather, the North insisted that the prisoners be released only after a complete settlement was reached, including both military and political elements. As “Gen. Quang” is quoted in the document as saying:

We still have among us Comrades who think: why do we keep these POWs and not take advantage of the Nixon proposals? Do we really want to resolve this matter after all? It needs to be noted that such a point of view is profoundly mistaken. This is not political

horse-trading but rather an important and serious argument for successful resolution of the Vietnam problem. ... We firmly hold to our position—when the American government resolves the political and military issues on all three fronts of Indochina, we will set free all American POWs.

I must assume that Schanberg never read the document that is central to his case. Otherwise, I am at a loss to understand how he could have concluded that it provides evidence of an intent to use POWs to obtain aid after the war was over.

Schanberg also claims that during the peace negotiations with Henry Kissinger, the North Vietnamese negotiators “tied the prisoner issue tightly to the issue of reparations.” But that, too, is phony history. There was no North Vietnamese linkage at any time during the talks. The North Vietnamese did try to leverage U.S. implementation of the entire agreement, including the postwar reconstruction assistance provision (Article 21). But that came in negotiations that began later in 1973, several months after the release of U.S. prisoners, and the linkage involved the North Vietnamese implementation of Article 8(b) on providing an accounting for the U.S. Missing in Action and return of remains. The Vietnamese insisted then and for many years after that on U.S. implementation of its postwar assistance obligation under the agreement as a condition for carrying out Article 8(b).

Furthermore, after the war ended and the Nixon administration reneged on the aid pledge, Hanoi gave no hint that there could be more prisoners discovered. As a consultant to the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia, I accompanied the first official postwar U.S. delegation to Hanoi in January 1976. Had it intended to use POWs as leverage on postwar reconstruction aid, this was the time for Hanoi to signal to the delegation that it had found evidence of more POWs and was ready to release them once the aid issue was resolved.

Instead, as my own notes on the meeting show, Deputy Foreign Minister Phan Hien told the Committee, “We are prepared to carry out [Article 8(b)] fully if you carry out fully Article 21.”

The only thing Schanberg can cite in support of his conviction that Hanoi was hoping to get money for live POWs is Reagan administration national security adviser Richard Allen's claim that an unidentified third country had passed on an offer of 50 POWs in return for \$4 billion in 1981. No other official—intelligence, State, or Defense—has ever suggested that there was any such offer, and Allen later said it didn't happen. We are asked to believe the absurd

notion that, after nine years of silence about its secret stash of POWs, Hanoi decided that the Reagan administration was the perfect partner to do a deal on live POWs for cash.

Schanberg also butchers the history of Vietnamese prisoner release after the war with the French. He writes, "Hanoi ... appears to have held back prisoners—just as it had done when the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 and withdrew their forces from Vietnam. In that case, France paid ransoms for prisoners and brought them home." Schanberg apparently got that idea from MIA activist literature and never bothered to check the historical record. It is very clear: what the French paid for was the maintenance of French military cemeteries in Vietnam. When President Richard Nixon falsely claimed in July 1972 that French POWs had been held by the Vietnamese long after the Indochina War, the French government promptly issued a statement saying, "We consider the last French prisoners to have been returned by the North Vietnamese less than three months after the conclusion of the Geneva agreements in 1954."

Schanberg didn't even bother to look into the actual figures on the investigation of reports of live sightings of U.S. POWs after the war, on which he puts so much credence. When the first detailed examination of the reports was made public in 1983, it showed that of 526 claims by refugees to have seen U.S. prisoners in Indochina, more than half had turned out to have been sightings of Americans who had already been released, and 54 were known or suspected fabrications. Of the remaining 190, there were only 21 reports from people who claimed they saw individuals who they knew were Americans clearly being held prisoner, and for whom there was not already an accounting. Those 21 individuals had been given polygraph tests, and 19 of those tests indicated deception, while two were inconclusive. ■

Gareth Porter is an investigative journalist and historian specializing in national security policy and author of Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam. He was a consultant to the House Select Committee on Missing Persons in Southeast Asia in 1975-76.

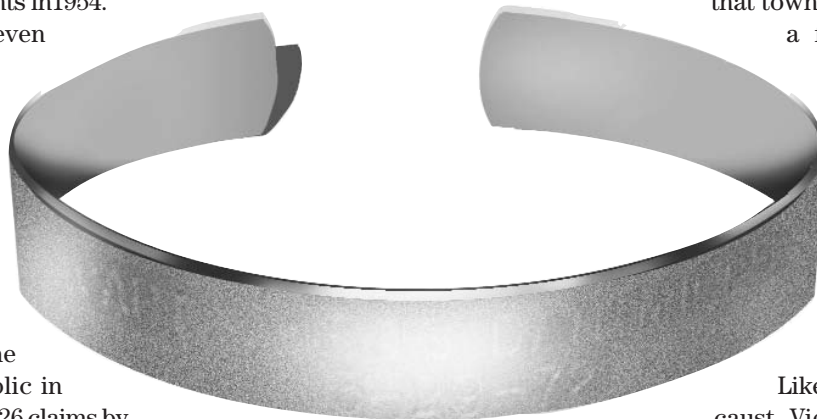
Andrew J. Bacevich At the very center of the town common here in Walpole, Massachusetts, as throughout much of New England, stands a very imposing flagpole. Just below Old Glory flies the POW/MIA flag, an artifact of the Vietnam War. The inscription declares "You Are Not Forgotten." For the citizens of Walpole, what does that banner signify?

As a practical matter, most of us—myself included—have long since ceased to hold in memory those who never returned, whether from Vietnam or prior American wars. For families left to ponder the fate of loved ones who remain unaccounted for, that is not the case, of course. Yet such families are relatively few in number. The rest of us, our lives filled to the brim with challenge and difficulty, each of us apportioned our own share of pain and heart-break, have long since moved on.

Were local authorities to end the practice of displaying the POW/MIA flag, however, my guess is that townspeople would raise a fuss. The tradition fills a psychic void. Decades after the United States officially ended its involvement in the Vietnam War, that entire episode in our history remains unfinished business. Like slavery or the Holocaust, Vietnam is part of the past not yet fully consigned to the past.

The practice of publicly displaying the POW/MIA flag testifies to this fact. On the one hand, it represents a lingering communal acknowledgment of loss and more broadly of massive national failure. On the other, it sustains the pretense—utterly illusory—that a proper accounting, not only of the missing but of the entire Vietnam experience, is still forthcoming. "You deserve to be brought home," the flag implicitly states, "And we deserve to know why you were sent in the first place."

Yet to undertake a serious accounting would find Americans facing a plethora of discomfiting truths, not only about the knaves and fools who concocted the Vietnam War but about the American way of life and the premises on which it is based. Tell the whole truth about Vietnam and you crack open a door that few Americans wish to peer behind. To do so is to come face-to-face with troubling



questions about the meaning of freedom and democracy as actually practiced in the United States.

Few Americans are willing to confront such questions, the answers to which could oblige us to revise the way we live. So we salve our consciences by flying flags, sustaining the pretense that we care when what we desperately want to do is to forget as much as possible. The feeble public response elicited by Sydney Schanberg's reporting on the fate of American POWs testifies to our steely determination to ignore whatever we find unwelcome or inconvenient.

What prompts these observations is my conviction that Americans are even today repeating this process of forgetting while pretending to remember.

This time around Iraq stands in for Vietnam. For its part, Washington has already left Bush's war behind. Whether out of self-delusion or pure, unvarnished cynicism, those who promoted the invasion of Iraq as an appropriate response to 9/11 are now declaring the entire enterprise a great triumph. Celebrating the putative achievements of the surge, they evince little interest in recalling either the several years during which the war was grotesquely mismanaged or the very reasons conjured up to justify the invasion in the first place. "Bush's War," in their telling, has now been rechristened "Petraeus's War."

Barack Obama's has made himself party to this calculated revisionism. Keen to focus on their own agenda (to include their own war in AfPak), ostensibly liberal Democrats—the ones who promised to change the way Washington works—collaborate with neoconservatives and other right-wing militarists to put Iraq in the nation's rearview mirror.

Will Washington succeed in perpetrating this fraud? The answer is almost certainly yes. No doubt the Congress will soon take up the business of commissioning an Iraq War memorial to be erected somewhere on the Mall amidst all the other memorials commemorating past American wars. What Congress will not do, however, is demand a full accounting of all that our long misadventure in Iraq has wrought. Nor will the American people insist on such an accounting. Truth will remain unwelcome. Our preference for sanitized history will persist.

Perhaps we need another flag. The text on this one should read, "Suckered Again—and We Let It Happen." ■

Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of history and international relations at Boston University. His new book, out this summer, is Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War.

John LeBoutillier The POW issue was born during the Watergate scandal. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger knew Hanoi was secretly keeping American prisoners, but in the spring of 1973, they were in no position to get a Democratic Congress to pay ransom to North Vietnam.

Watergate was exposed because two *Washington Post* reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, defied the unspoken agreement between media and government that remains in effect—in exchange for protecting government secrets, the press gets privileged access to official sources. That tacit pact is the single biggest reason the POW puzzle has never been solved.

My own experience provides a vivid—and exasperating—example of how this incestuous relationship between the press and the powerful.

In October 1985, Rowland Evans and Robert Novak held their semi-annual Evans & Novak Political Forum in Washington, D.C. for their newsletter subscribers. Each of us—I had been a subscriber since 1974—paid \$450 for a full day of talks from "D.C. political insiders." The line-up featured Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, White House Chief of Staff Don Regan, New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, and President Reagan's national security adviser, Robert McFarlane.

After the morning introduction, I walked up to Novak and asked him, "Is what is said in here today on the record?"

He smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "You paid to attend this conference, and you are not a member of the media, so those press rules do not apply to you."

I returned to my seat at a long table where I had a cassette tape recorder clearly visible on top of the white tablecloth. When McFarlane began talking, I turned on the recorder. In the Q&A period afterward, I asked McFarlane—a retired Marine who had been on Kissinger's staff during the Nixon administration and had been secretly dispatched to negotiate with Hanoi for the remaining 600 POWs—"Do you believe there are still U.S. POWs held against their will in Vietnam and Laos?"

McFarlane took a long time before he began his answer: "I do think there has to be—have to be—live Americans there." He paused. The room grew silent as we watched this clearly conflicted man struggle to continue. We knew we were hearing a rare unscripted answer. He began talking about the thousands of live sighting reports coming into the Pentagon and Defense Intelligence Agency from Vietnam and Laos. Of those Southeast Asians who claimed to have seen American POWs, McFarlane said, "They have no reason to lie, and they are telling things they have seen."

A follow-up question centered on whether the U.S. government had done everything it could to pinpoint and recover these POWs. Admitting that it had not, he said, "And that's bad, and that's a failure."

I gave the tape to *Wall Street Journal* reporter Bill Paul, who was based in New York. He listened to it and knew he had a big story in his hands. He called National Security Council spokeswoman Karna Small, who had attended McFarlane's talk. She denied that McFarlane ever said the words we had heard from him that very day. Paul said, "But the *Journal* has a transcript." Her reply: "The transcript is wrong."

At that point Paul knew his story was even bigger—he had McFarlane's spokeswoman lying about her boss's answers just hours earlier. So he called her back and said, "The transcript is not wrong. In fact, we have it all on tape."

Bingo!

She said, "I have to get back to you."

Minutes later the *Wall Street Journal's* D.C. bureau chief, Al Hunt, called Paul and took over the editing of the story. Meanwhile, Evans and Novak tracked me down and accused me of violating protocol by exposing "off-the-record remarks by McFarlane." They had suddenly forgotten that I specifically asked Novak whether the session was on or off the record.

In other words, the media—Al Hunt and Rowland Evans and Robert Novak—banded together to protect McFarlane and their access to him at the expense of a dynamite story. A watered-down version eventually ran and garnered some national attention, but never the continual front-page coverage it deserved.

A few months later, at a private meeting of the House Special Task Force on POWs/MIAs, I delivered a talk about a recent report of POWs being held at a specific location in Laos. Rep. John McCain was sitting in the front row of the tiered hearing room. Until that day, he and I had always had a cordial relationship. But upon seeing me, he sneered and asked if I was "secretly taping *this* meeting, too?"

McCain should have been incensed that the national security adviser knew that U.S. POWs were still being held and that the press was suppressing the story. Instead he was furious at me for daring to reveal McFarlane's statements.

The Vietnam War was brought to an end in large part by a healthy, skeptical, adversarial relationship between the media and government. Reporters' suspicions that they were being deceived by military briefers every afternoon in Saigon at the Five O'clock Follies were the precursor to serious critical coverage of the war. Yet somehow this skeptical media has always believed the very same Pentagon when it comes to POWs.

The incident from 1985 is but one example of many. In my 30 years fighting for the truth about the POWs knowingly abandoned by the Nixon administration, I have repeatedly witnessed an eager partnership between the officials who make national policy and the media that is supposed to cover them—not to cover-up for them. ■

John LeBoutillier (R-N.Y.) was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1981-1983, where he served on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Special House Task Force on U.S. POWs in SE Asia. He is the author of Vietnam Now: The Case for Normalizing Relations With Hanoi.

Alexander Cockburn Unlike the French or the Italians, for whom conspiracies are an integral part of government activity, acknowledged by all, Americans have been temperamentally prone to discount them. Reflecting its audience, the press follows suit. Editors and reporters like to offer themselves as hardened cynics, following the old maxim "Never believe anything till it is officially denied," but in truth, they are touchingly credulous, ever inclined to trust the official version, at least until irrefutable evidence—say, the failure to discover a single WMD in Iraq—compels them finally to a darker view.

Once or twice a decade some official deception simply cannot be sedately circumnavigated. Even in the 1950s, when the lid of government secrecy was more firmly bolted down, the grim health consequences of atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons in the South Pacific, Utah, and Nevada finally surfaced. In the late 1960s, it was the turn of the CIA, some of its activities first exposed in relatively marginal publications like *The Nation* and *Ramparts*, then finally given wider circulation.

Even then the mainstream press exhibited extreme trepidation in running any story presuming to discredit the moral credentials of the U.S. government. Take assassination as an instrument of national policy. In these post-9/11 days, when Dennis Blair, the director of national intelligence, publicly declares, as he did before the House Intelligence Committee, that the government has the right to kill Americans abroad, it is easy to forget that nothing used to more rapidly elicit furious denials from the CIA than allegations about its efforts, stretching back to the late 1940s, to kill inconvenient foreign leaders. Charges by the Cubans through the 1960s and early 1970s about the Agency's serial attempts to murder Fidel Castro were routinely ignored, until finally the Senate hearings conducted

in 1976 by Sen. Frank Church elicited a conclusive record of about 20 separate efforts.

Indeed, there was a brief window in the early '70s, amid revulsion over the Vietnam War and the excitement of the Watergate hearings, when the press exhibited a certain unwonted bravado, in part because investigative committees of Congress, enlivened by Watergate, made good use of subpoena power and immunity from threats of libel. Hence the famous Lockheed bribery hearings.

Decorum soon returned, however, amid stern warnings by the late Katharine Graham, chairman of the Washington Post Company. "The press these days should ... be rather careful about its role," she told the Magazine Publishers' Association. "We had better not yield to the temptation to go on refighting the next war and seeing conspiracy and cover-up where they do not exist." Mrs. Graham's employees duly took heed. "Conspiracy-mongering" can be a deadly charge leveled at a reporter or an editor.

Just over 20 years later, in 1996, the *Washington Post* fired off a six-part series, concocted with the help of Harvard profs, decked out with doleful front-page headlines such as "In America, Loss of Confidence Seeps Into Institutions." Cutting through the underbrush of graphs and pizza-

"The *Post*'s earnest message was that mistrust is bad and that it is better for social stability and contentment to trust government."

slice charts, one found something simple: it's as if P.T. Barnum set forth across the country to see if one was being born every minute, got to the edge of the Midwest, looked around and then muttered to himself mournfully, "No suckers!" The *Post*'s earnest message was that mistrust is bad and that it is better for social stability and contentment to trust government, as in the golden '50s, which, the older crowd may recall, was a time when government told soldiers it was safe to march into atomic test sites and when government-backed doctors offered radioactive oatmeal to retarded kids without their parents' knowledge.

The mainstream press—what's left of it—sees an important duty to foster confidence in public institutions. On May 6, right after disclosure of Goldman Sachs' double dealing, came the plummet and surge in the stock market that for a brief moment sliced 998 points off the Dow, prompting serious losses to small investors who had placed stop-loss orders on individual stocks. On Comedy

Central, Jon Stewart showed a stream of news anchors characterizing everything from the GM bailout to the mortgage crisis to the rescue of AIG as caused by a "perfect storm." Stewart said, "I'm beginning to think these are not perfect storms. I'm beginning to think these are regular storms and we have a s---ty boat." But the mainstream press zealously steered clear of suggestions that market manipulators might have engineered a killing.

The integration of journalists into Washington's policy apparatus, with its luxuriant jungle of lobby shops thinly disguised as nonprofits, with their seminars, "scholars in residence," and fellowships, has led to a decorous tendency to ignore the grime of politics at the level of corruption, blackmail, and bribery—mostly inaccessible anyway without the power of subpoena. There's an interesting genre of books, some written by political fixers in the aftermath of exposure or incarceration—Bobby Baker's *Wheeling and Dealing* is a good example—that usefully describe the grime, but these are rarely reviewed in respectable journals.

Sometimes a cover-up does surface, propelled into the light of day by a tenacious journalist. Then there's the outraged counterattack. Are you suggesting, sir, that the CIA connived to smuggle cocaine into America's inner cities? Gary Webb's career at the *San Jose Mercury News* was efficiently destroyed. Those who took the trouble to read the subsequent full report of CIA Inspector General Fred Hitz found corroboration of Webb's charges. But by then the caravan had moved on. A jury issued its verdict, but the press box was empty.

Maybe now the decline in power of the established corporate press, the greater availability of dissenting versions of politics and history, and the exposure of the methods used to coerce public support for the attack on Iraq have engendered a greater sense of realism on the part of Americans about what their government can do. Perhaps the press will be more receptive to discomfiting stories about what Washington is capable of in the pursuit of what it deems to be the national interest. Hopefully, in this more fertile soil, Syd Schanberg's pertinacity will be vindicated at last, and those still active in politics who connived at this abandonment will be forced to give an account. ■

Alexander Cockburn co-edits CounterPunch. He is a regular columnist for The Nation and also writes a weekly syndicated column. Among his books are Whiteout: The CIA, Drugs, and the Press, End Times: The Death of the Fourth Estate (both co-authored with Jeffrey St. Clair) and Washington Babylon, co-authored with Ken Silverstein.

McCain's Last Battle

The maverick tries to remake himself as a conservative.

By W. James Antle III

THE SCENE OPENS with two men walking down a long dirt road in Nogales, Arizona, near the Mexican border. The camera pans to John McCain, clad in a leather jacket and wearing a Navy baseball cap. McCain begins to enumerate the social disorders afflicting the region: "Drug and human smuggling, home invasions, murder."

"We're outmanned," Pinal County Sheriff Paul Babeu replies. "Of all the illegals in America, more than half come through Arizona." A concerned look flashing across his face, McCain asks, "Have we got the right plan?" He's referring to the Border Security Action Plan he introduced with his fellow Republican senator from Arizona, Jon Kyl. It would send National Guardsmen to the border, hire 3,000 new Border Patrol agents, and, as McCain put it, "complete the danged fence." "Plan's perfect," the sheriff assures him before signing off, "Senator, you're one of us."

It's just a 30-second television ad, but its message may decide Arizona's Aug. 24 primary for the Republican senatorial nomination. Arizona has become ground zero in the fight over illegal immigration. The legislature has enacted a series of tough new laws aimed at making attrition through enforcement the official state policy, the latest of which controversially allows police officers to ask for proof of legal status when, during the course of their work, they encounter someone they have a "reasonable suspicion" might be illegal.

This law, with its "papers, please" connotations, has set off a national

firestorm. In Arizona, one poll showed voters supported it by 70 percent to 23 percent. Jittery moderate Republicans like Gov. Jan Brewer were loath to stand in its way. Now McCain, too, must convince Arizonans, tired of living with the daily consequences of sieve-like borders, that he is with them on the question of illegal immigration.

It will be a tough sell. McCain has for decades been mass immigration's main man in the Senate. A pal of professional open-borders agitators like Juan Hernandez, he spent most of George W. Bush's presidency as the leading Republican supporter of amnesty under the guise of "comprehensive immigration reform." McCain championed such legislation alongside the late liberal Ted Kennedy, carrying water for the immigration lawyers who helped write it.

McCain's amnesty advocacy nearly derailed his 2008 presidential campaign, before the last iteration of McCain-Kennedy was voted down and he began to embrace the enforcement-first position preferred by most Republican primary voters. But one man stands ready to remind Arizonans of McCain's past record: former Congressman J.D. Hayworth, an alumnus of the Republican class of '94 who today challenges McCain for the GOP Senate nomination.

A conservative radio talk-show host and former sportscaster, Hayworth is not afraid to raise his booming voice against McCain's immigration gymnastics. *U.S. News and World Report* quotes Hayworth calling McCain's commercial

"just hilarious." The primary challenger says he will launch a website called "The Danged Truth" contrasting the new Minuteman McCain with the four-term senator's previous positions.

Hayworth isn't the only Republican looking askance at McCain's immigration makeover. MSNBC commentator Joe Scarborough laughed out loud after playing McCain's "danged fence" ad on his show. "Brought to you by the guy who brought you Kennedy-McCain," he said. Congressman John Shadegg, an Arizona Republican, was also obviously amused but said politely, "It seems like some politicians have changed ground on this issue."

J.D. Hayworth hasn't changed. Before he was unseated in the Democratic tsunami of 2006, Hayworth was viewed as one of Congress' leading immigration hawks. He even published the book *Whatever It Takes: Border Security, Illegal Immigration, and the War on Terror*. In fact, his defeat was often cited by amnesty supporters as a data point against the popularity of immigration enforcement. Hayworth—who describes himself as the "consistent conservative" in the race—is positioned as one of this year's conservative insurgents running against a candidate favored by the Republican establishment.

Unfortunately, Hayworth's style of conservatism is very much in the fashion of the Bush years. On foreign policy, he is scarcely distinguishable from McCain: Kosovo was the last war he opposed; he voted to invade Iraq and hasn't entertained second thoughts

since. Steve Sailer might call it invade the world without invite the world.

Hayworth voted for the Medicare prescription drug benefit (McCain voted against it), which added trillions to the federal government's unfunded liabilities and was the biggest new entitlement since the Great Society. He conveniently opposes budget-busting entitlements now that the Democrats are in charge.

As co-chairman of the Congressional Native American Caucus, Hayworth was the largest single recipient of Jack Abramoff-related financial contributions. He has publicly warned McCain that if the senator brings up his Abramoff connections, he will bring up the Keating Five.

Stylistically, Hayworth is more shock jock than statesman. George Will recalled that the former congressman jogged wearing a T-shirt that read, "If two teenagers can procreate in the back seat of a Volkswagen, why does a spotted owl need 2,000 acres?" Will quipped, "Hayworth's middle name is not Nuance." McCain put out a clever ad mocking some of Hayworth's more over-the-top statements—regarding the president's birth certificate, man-horse marriage, and some other colorful locutions—but the commercial had the potential to backfire by making conservatives feel that they were really the butt of McCain's joke.

How competitive the race will be remains to be seen. The polls are all over the place—since April, McCain's lead has ranged from a high of 26 points to a low of just 5—but Hayworth has yet to run ahead of the incumbent. McCain is nevertheless taking the challenge very seriously and running almost as if he is the underdog. In recent primaries and nominating conventions, candidates favored by the GOP establishment have either lost or won by much smaller than expected margins.

Where Hayworth has so far had his biggest impact is in forcing McCain to

the right. Surely, the senator's personal pique against Barack Obama is also a factor in his recent rightward drift. McCain's voting record was at its most liberal in the several years after he lost the 2000 GOP presidential nomination to George W. Bush. The 2008 race didn't leave him any more inclined to do Obama any favors. But it takes more than sour grapes and Arizona's political climate to explain McCain's explicit repudiation of his maverick past.

Already two liberal causes favored by McCain the maverick may be a casualty of the primary fight against Hayworth: amnesty and curbing carbon emissions through cap and trade. McCain is not believed to be involved in legislative negotiations with the Democrats over immigration. He has said he opposes the cap-and-trade bill with the best chance of moving through the Senate. In his absence, the Republicans' leading point man to provide bipartisan cover to both these initiatives was Lindsey Graham, the South Carolina Republican who is one of McCain's biggest allies.

In late April, Graham abruptly pulled out as a co-sponsor of the modified cap-and-trade bill and declared his opposition to taking up immigration this year. "Moving forward on immigration—in this hurried, panicked manner—is nothing more than a cynical ploy," the senator said in an open letter to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "Unless their plan substantially changes this weekend, I will be unable to move forward on energy independence legislation at this time."

Graham's stated reason was that there had been no real talks laying the groundwork for amnesty, suggesting that the Democrats' push was an attempt to turn out Hispanic voters this November rather than a serious effort to liberalize immigration laws. Offering up amnesty only to have the Republicans take the lead in voting it down—while liberal

activists demagogue away—might conceivably benefit Democrats like Reid. It would also make the cap-and-trade bill a futile effort, as it would have to be addressed just before the election.

Washington insiders quickly recognized another Graham motive: taking up immigration would put McCain in an awkward spot. He would have to either vote against his conscience or take a potentially deadly position in the primary against Hayworth. Even if McCain found a convenient rationale for tacking to the right on immigration, simply bringing the subject up would probably hurt him with primary voters. Graham was riding to the Arizonan's rescue.

That means both climate-change legislation and amnesty may be dead for the duration of this Congress. This puts McCain in the more enviable position of defending his home state's get-tough approach to illegal immigration. He has called the controversial new law a "good tool" for police and said on the Senate floor, "If you don't like the legislation that the legislature passed and the governor signed in Arizona, then carry out the federal responsibilities, which are to secure the border."

One of those AWOL federal officials was, of course, Senator McCain himself. The man who now wants to complete the "danged fence" once told *Vanity Fair* that he would reluctantly "build the goddamn fence if they [voters] want it." Who knows what conversion may lie ahead if McCain is safely re-elected to a six-year Senate term?

Arizona Republicans now find themselves in what has become a familiar position for GOP sympathizers: they must choose between a chest-thumping, Bush-league conservative or a Republican they cannot trust. Sounds like the Straight Talk Express to nowhere. ■

W. James Antle III is associate editor of The American Spectator.

Boy George

Exclusive excerpts from the former First Lady's new book, *Spoken from the Heart*

By Laura Bush

WORKING AS A LIBRARIAN in Midland was never dull. Far from it! One blustery spring day a boy walked in with an agitated step and a runny nose.

I asked if he was looking for a book. "Ha! As if!" he scoffed, then scampered away. After trying in vain to sound out the signs on the mop closet and the periodicals section, he strode into the women's restroom. Amid much shrieking, the poor young man took quite a beating from the handbags of several Midland matrons. (Believe me, we women of West Texas will stand our ground. My mother's generation made their handbags from studded rawhide.) The local constable was ready to haul the frightened boy away before it dawned on me what the matter was.

You see, this unfortunate youngster did not know how to read.

I took the boy aside, dressed his wounds and blotted his pant leg, and read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* to him. He was as transfixed by the text as by the Caldecott-winning watercolors.

Two dates later, the boy proposed. And although my George may not have managed a whole book yet, he continues to show steady progress.

* * *

After my youthful involvement in a fatal accident, marrying into the Bush family was a storybook ending. (*Crime and Punishment* is and always will be my favorite novel about the expiation of sins.)

The Bush clan is so full of vivid characters. Not for nothing is my George

named after his father. The son is still just as fascinated by the barcode scanner at the supermarket as his father ever was. Both love to play horseshoes, though my George has a special fondness for the shiny ones.

And then there is George's mother, Bar, from whom I have learned so much. I'll never forget one of her *mots*, just days before the 2000 election when all our nerves were a bit frayed. "Those ghastly journalists are saying my poor thickhead was a drunken driver. Well, at least *he* never committed vehicular homicide, did he now, Laura? Pass the potatoes."

Yes, I have learned so much from

midnight, smelling strongly of mouthwash and hiccupping with fatigue. Several times he had worked so hard that he arrived at the bedside propped up by Karl Rove and Donald Rumsfeld, who would then lay him on the mattress with a kind word. Rove and Rumsfeld remain dear friends to this day.

After such late nights, George would often be a bit worse for wear and sometimes rather peevish. I remember one morning when he complained of a terrible headache, retched into his loafers, then told me snappishly that the gorgeous burgundy de la Renta gown I had just worn to the Japanese consulate

THE SON IS STILL JUST AS **FASCINATED BY THE BARCODE SCANNER** AT THE SUPERMARKET AS HIS FATHER EVER WAS. BOTH LOVE TO PLAY HORSESHOES, THOUGH MY **GEORGE HAS A SPECIAL FONDNESS** FOR THE SHINY ONES.

Bar's wit and sparkle. That is the reason I begin most speaking engagements by lightheartedly comparing her to Don Corleone, Mr. Kurtz, or Anton Chigurh. A bond of love unites us.

* * *

When Iraq's road to democracy started to become a bit rocky, George's work habits changed radically. For the first two and a half years of his presidency, I had always tucked him in by 8:00 with a glass of warm milk and—if he had been good—a bedtime story. But starting in the fall of 2003, he would stumble into the bedroom long after

looked "damn whorish." I gave him a look, and he changed his tune right away. "Don't worry, I'll try to find it in my heart to ask God to forgive you," said a penitent First Husband. "He and I talk every day you know! In fact, He's the one who calls me, 'cause I'm el Presidente, ain't I? Now come over here and kiss me on the mouth!"

This is part of the deeply spiritual side of George that few people see. Believe me, it's there.

* * *

The mounting criticism of the liberation of Iraq was something none of us

could ignore. As ever, George's mother was the first to rally to her beleaguered son. "Have you heard, some jumped-up little Spaniard is calling my boy a war criminal. Well, at least my little thick-head never killed anyone, did he now, Laura? Pass the carrots."

I will always, it occurred to me as my wineglass shattered in my hand, cherish Bar's wit and sparkle!

How will history come to view my George? It is, of course, too soon to tell. After all, Ronald Reagan was derided by historians during his presidency, only to be praised by them later. The same goes for Jesus, as George likes to point out at mealtimes. And ditto for Genghis Khan, in whose honor our second-favorite Chinese restaurant in Midland was named. History is indeed fickle, but I have perfect faith that my George's presidency will surely be viewed as better than "worst ever."

After all, didn't George introduce the Dewey decimal system into Afghanistan, something that Alexander the Great and the Soviet Union both failed to do?

In the meantime, George's mother, such a strong, steely woman, can't help but heave a sigh now and then and wonder aloud what went awry. I will never forget one such instance late last August over lunch in Kennebunkport. "Honestly, where on earth were my thickhead's advisers?" she asked us. "It seems that those nearest and dearest to my poor dim son failed him utterly. Utterly! Didn't they, Laura? Didn't they? Beet salad, choppy chop."

I will always, it struck me as I accidentally spilled the bright vegetables all over her dress, cherish Bar's wit and sparkle! ■

—as told to Chase Madar

Laura Bush is the former First Lady of the United States. Chase Madar is a lawyer in New York City.

Golfer in Chief

The best thing about Obama is the time he spends on the links.

By Scott McConnell

"IKE'S NOT A COMMUNIST, he's a golfer." The quip comes from paleoconservative sage Russell Kirk, when asked about John Birch Society chief Robert Welch's charge that President Eisenhower was a Communist agent. Ike wasn't the only Red in Welch's sights. "I personally believe [Secretary of State] Dulles to be a communist agent," he wrote, and CIA chief Allen Dulles "is the most protected and untouchable supporter of Communism, next to Eisenhower himself, in Washington." Further, "The chances are very strong that Milton Eisenhower is actually Dwight Eisenhower's superior and boss within the Communist Party."

What chance has Barack Hussein Obama to be judged by more sober standards? Granted, Welch in his heyday was considered a kook, while Obama is viewed as secretly disloyal by meatier segments of the Right. Rush Limbaugh, probably the most influential voice of the conservative movement, recently told listeners that Obama is governing with "the express purpose of overthrowing this country." Rush believes (or at least says) that Obama is not driven by communist doctrine but a Third World desire for payback for America's historical crimes. The president has been on this mission, Rush asserts, "far longer than you think."

Most modern-day conservatives do not disassociate themselves from Limbaugh the way Bill Buckley and Kirk distanced themselves from Welch and

the Birchers. The comment boards on big conservative websites are full of Obama-the-totalitarian, Obama-the-closet-Islamist rhetoric. A few conservatives find this rhetoric distasteful and self-defeating, not to mention remote from observable facts. But the best retort to the reckless charges may be the same as Kirk's: No, Obama's not carrying out a long-term plan to overthrow the United States. He's a golfer.

Unpacking Kirk's remark requires some sense of the game and its impact on the personality. Obama has clearly become hooked. It was reported that he had played 32 times prior to the funeral of the Polish prime minister, when, seizing the opportunity provided by the volcano air-travel shutdown, he teed it up. This is a pace of about 24 rounds a year, well short of Eisenhower's hundred. Unlike Ike, Obama doesn't walk around the residence with a pitching wedge in hand or practice eight irons on the White House grounds. But he plays golf with the frequency of a man committed to the game.

By most accounts, Obama is still a mediocre player. Reports have him shooting in the 90s and low hundreds. He has poor technique in greenside bunkers, a sure recipe for fattening a score, but he plays seriously, recording real scores without mulligans.

Obama was a varsity basketball player in high school who still looks athletic on the court, and he has a fluid-looking golf swing. I'm sure he hits

plenty of fine shots, the kind that tell him, "If I could only play and practice a bit more, I could get pretty good." Most people who were strong high school athletes can. One of golf's wonders is that a reasonably fit adult can continue to improve throughout his 50s. Last year Tom Watson nearly won the British Open at age 59, beating a field of men half his age. That was exceptional, but in any other sport it would be out of the question.

Let's dispense with platitudes about golf being a great way to relax, to put aside the cares of the office, to bond with friends, to commune with nature. All are true, but the same could be said of fishing or hiking. Those pastimes don't become obsessive. Golf does.

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For the avid golfer, few pleasures rival hitting a good shot. Sex, sometimes. Exquisite food, maybe. Doing something very well in your profession, certainly. But striking a good golf shot pushes a lot of psychic satisfaction buttons. It requires both physical grace and mental control. The margin between hitting well and hitting poorly is small. A good shot rewards, however fleetingly, with a sense of mastery.

Some writers describe this in mystical terms. Here's John Updike in *Rabbit, Run*. His protagonist, 20-something former high school basketball star Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom, is playing golf with Eccles, an Episcopal priest. Rabbit has a busted marriage and is having trouble with adulthood. There is something, some "it," that was missing from his marriage and remains absent from his life. Perhaps it's God or the sense of wholeness and peace that some people seek in church. Eccles isn't convinced and indeed questions whether there is any "it" at all. He asks Rabbit to describe what he's looking for:

In avoiding looking at Eccles, he looks at the ball, which sits high on a tee and already seems free of the ground. Very simply he brings the clubhead around his shoulder into it. The sound has a hollowness, a singleness he hasn't heard before. His arms force his head up and his ball is hung way out, lunarly pale against the beautiful black blue of storm clouds, his grandfather's color stretched dense across the north. It recedes along a line straight as a ruler-edge. Stricken; sphere, star, speck. It hesitates, and Rabbit thinks it will die, but he's fooled, for the ball makes its hesitation the ground of a final leap: with a kind of visible sob it takes a last bite of space, before vanishing in falling.

'That's it,' he cries, turning to Eccles with a grin of aggrandizement. 'That's it.'

The satisfaction doesn't last, and even avid players lose interest in the game. But those who are getting better tend to stay committed. Obama, who started playing in his late thirties, is still on the upward stage of his golf trajectory, the most rewarding stage, and the one most likely to border on compulsion.

Some on the Left have already complained that golf is damaging his presidency. *The New Republic's* Michelle Cottle laments that the spirit of "change you can believe in" is being dissipated on the golf course. She is on to something. A disciplined person can compartmentalize, shove the golf thoughts into a corner and let them out only for their allotted ten or 15 hours of the week. But their presence makes a difference. Golf crowds out other, potentially competing, obsessions. A golfing president can put in the focused hours his job requires, but grandiose dreams about what his office can accomplish are likely to be restrained. Golf teaches the recognition of limits. Don't swing too hard. Power is found in balance, in tempo, in not overreaching. No golfer is a revolutionary.

Does the president's mind wander to the pure six iron he hit in his last round while he is working on talking points that recommend Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court? I would bet it does. Does Obama think more about his next round and how to play better infinitely more than he does about overthrowing the American system? Without a shadow of a doubt. Does golf limit his motivation even to transform the country, with the bitter, all-consuming fights this would require? Quite possibly that, too. ■

Editor at large Scott McConnell has an 8.4 handicap and shot three rounds in the 70s last year.

PIGS Crash to Earth

AMONG THE MEGA-FORCES moving the tectonic plates and imperiling the nation-states of the world from above and below are these:

First, ethno-nationalism, which threatens nations with secession and break-up. We see it with the Uighurs of China, the Naga of India, the Baluch of Iran and Pakistan, the Kurds of Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Turkey, the Chechens of the Russian Caucasus, and the Walloons of Belgium.

Second, transnationalism. This is the project of global elites who seek to reduce nations to ethno-cultural enclaves in a new world order run by these same bloodless bureaucrats whose loyalty is neither to the land nor people whence they came.

Their work in progress, the European Union, however, is imperiled. For the EU just took a great leap forward to force Europe's most indebted nations to surrender their economic independence or be expelled from the European Monetary Union. The PIGS—Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Spain—may rebel.

Indeed, we may see cascading rebellions across Europe recalling 1848, but with a different outcome.

What brought the EU to this day of reckoning is its decision to go for a trillion-dollar bailout of Greece, Portugal, and Spain rather than letting them default or restructure their debts. These nations are now being directed by the EU and International Monetary Fund to slash public spending and raise taxes, though all suffer from high unemployment, with Spain's at 20 percent.

If Berlin gets its way, these nations may also be forced to submit their budgets in advance to Brussels and accept EU-dictated limits on the deficits they will be permitted to run. This would entail a sweep-

ing surrender of sovereignty, independence, and economic freedom.

Moreover, as the pain of this "rescue" is to be borne by the debtors, while the beneficiaries are the French and German banks that hold tens of billions in PIG paper, a question arises. Why should Athens make Greeks suffer and risk political ruin at the polls, rather than default and let the banks and bondholders of Europe share in the pain?

Why not quit the EMU, default, repudiate the euro, restore the drachma, and devalue? That would make Greek exports more competitive and make Greece a more desirable place in which to site one's next factory. And with its currency devalued, Greece would also become a more attractive destination for Western tourists.

But a Greek default is not the only threat to the EU. The European Central Bank has been buying Greek debt from the banks both to relieve them of the risk of a default and to restore market confidence in Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish bonds. Only when such confidence returns will investors buy new debt from the Club Med countries, all of which must issue new bonds to finance deficits and roll over maturing debt.

A problem, however, has also arisen here. As the ECB is buying up the debt of the PIGS, holders of Greek, Spanish, and Portuguese bonds are unloading them, getting out of Club Med paper while the getting is good.

The ECB seems to be substituting itself for the banks as the chump to be left holding the bag when the defaults begin.

The plunging euro is a sure sign the markets are coming to see that the only way the bonds of indebted European nations are going to be paid off is with a

huge infusion of euros, which may end that currency's status as a reliable store of value.

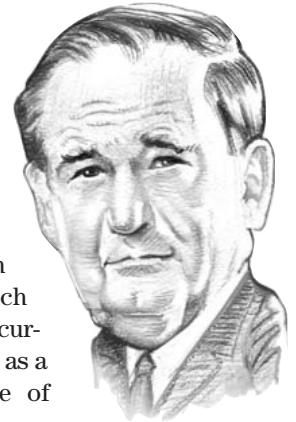
But "if the euro fails, it is not only the currency that fails," says German Chancellor Angela Merkel. "Then Europe fails. The idea of European unity fails."

Germans are especially enraged. To show that they were good Europeans, they gave up their beloved mark. Now, in recent elections in North-Rhine Westphalia, the Christian Democratic Union of Merkel took a thrashing, falling 10 points below the CDU's 2005 vote, and losing the upper chamber of the German parliament. Germans may be ready to shed the sackcloth and ashes they have worn for 65 years and start looking out for *Deutschland über alles*.

Given the strains on the European Monetary Union and EU, neither of which enjoys the love or loyalty that people render to the countries of their birth, the great unraveling may be about to begin. Why, after all, should the indebted nations of Europe impose suffering upon their peoples to pay off old debts now held by distant banks?

How does imposing austerity on Portugal, Spain, and Greece enable them to grow their way out of indebtedness? How does it help the EU grow if a large slice of the union is forced into austerity? And why should Germans who pay themselves modest pensions and hold off retirement put their savings at risk to bail out the Club Med?

Many have predicted that economic nationalism would one day tear apart the European Union. The hour may be at hand. ■



States' Fights

Nullification makes a comeback—and not just on the Right.

By Jeff Taylor

JOHN C. CALHOUN IS BACK with a vengeance, warming the hearts of Old South romantics while chilling the blood of modern liberals. He conjures up images both appealing and appalling: old-fashioned patriotism, partisan demagoguery, genuine fears, love of liberty. The modern Tea Party movement owes much of its inspiration to the Ron Paul campaign, the only national effort in recent years to mention the Tenth Amendment. Yet inevitably talk of nullification evokes memories of Calhoun and the Lost Cause—even though the roots of the idea run much deeper.

The re-emergence of nullification—the repudiation or ignoring of a federal law by a state government—poses an interesting challenge to the power of the federal government and its monopoly on constitutional interpretation.

In recent decades, the first organized attempt came from the Left and libertarian Right's advocacy of medical marijuana. The movement achieved success in California in 1996 with passage of Proposition 215—a direct affront to federal anti-drug laws—and has since spread to 13 other states. But in 2005, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Gonzales v. Raich* that the Constitution's commerce clause gives the federal government the right to criminalize marijuana. This trumping of states' rights was supported by George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, John Ashcroft, and Alberto Gonzales as plaintiffs, and was advanced by Justice Antonin Scalia. In addition to being joined by three of the court's Republican justices, Scalia allied with two liberals in

declaring that Angel Raich, a woman with a brain tumor, substantially affected interstate commerce when she grew a plant in her backyard and used it to alleviate her own suffering.

To his credit, Clarence Thomas dissented, writing, "If the majority is to be taken seriously, the Federal Government may now regulate quilting bees, clothes drives, and potluck suppers throughout the 50 states. This makes a mockery of Madison's assurance to the people of New York that the 'powers delegated' to the Federal Government are 'few and defined,' while those of the States are 'numerous and indefinite.'" He was referencing *Federalist* 45. Thomas further invoked the principle of original intent by noting, "In the early days of the Republic, it would have been unthinkable that Congress could prohibit the local cultivation, possession, and consumption of marijuana."

Chief Justice William Rehnquist also dissented. Similarly, the attorneys general of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana filed an *amicus curiae* brief supporting the defendant on states' rights grounds. The Deep South is not a hotbed of NORML members, but it does have a longstanding suspicion of federal usurpation of state prerogatives.

Although the Controlled Substances Act was deemed superior to the Tenth Amendment, the Obama administration has backed away from strict enforcement in clear cases of medical use in legalized states. De facto nullification has won a partial victory. But it is likely that the Justice Department's stance has

more to do with politics than principle. Barack Obama is a former professor of constitutional law, but he is not known as a friend of states' rights.

Nullification has been gaining popularity in states North, South, and West. One week before Obama assumed office, Joel Boniek introduced the Montana Firearms Freedom Act into the state legislature. The freshman Republican legislator previously affiliated with the Constitution Party was a veteran of Paul's 2008 campaign. His legislation challenged ATF authority, declaring federal firearms laws within the state to be null and void on the basis of the Second, Ninth, and Tenth Amendments. It was written and advanced by two other Paul admirers between 2004 and 2007, while Bush was president, but was twice defeated by the state senate. It eventually passed both houses and was signed into law by Gov. Brian Schweitzer, a Democrat. Firearms Freedom Acts have since been adopted by Tennessee, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, South Dakota, and Idaho, and are under consideration in 20 other states.

Another recent nullification effort concerns the Real ID Act of 2005, which sets national standards for state driver's licenses. According to the law, Americans without federally sanctioned licenses would be denied access to commercial airlines and federal buildings. The regulations were to take effect in 2008, but resistance forced the deadline back—first to 2010 and then to 2011. Half of the states have approved resolutions or laws refusing to follow the federal requirements.

As with firearms law, opposition to Real ID is a bipartisan effort. Following the lead of their more consistent brethren in the Constitution and Libertarian Parties, Republicans have been most vocal in objecting, but many Democrats have come aboard. In 2007, a de facto nullification resolution in Maine was approved by the state house 137-4 and by the state senate 34-0. The Utah legislature and Missouri senate also unanimously refused to co-operate with Real ID.

Governor Schweitzer, a strong opponent of Real ID, is former chairman of the Democratic Governors Association. Calling the law a “harebrained scheme” when interviewed by NPR in 2008, he ended with this verbal blast: “There’s nothing in the Constitution that tells Homeland Security that they’re supposed to do this or they must do this. ... This is another bluff by some bureaucrats in Washington, D.C., and thank God, we live a long ways from Washington, D.C.” Former Gov. Tim Kaine, who signed Virginia’s anti-Real ID bill into law last year, is today the chairman of the Democratic National Committee.

Now the recently enacted healthcare reform stands to become the subject of nullification efforts. There could be “mass noncompliance with the law without any consequences,” say Lisa Lambert and Karen Pierog of Reuters news service. Immediately after President Obama signed the legislation, 13 state attorneys general filed a lawsuit to block implementation on constitutional grounds. Five more have since joined in. (A collective suit represents Florida and 17 other states. Virginia has staked out a separate legal challenge.)

Unlike the medicinal marijuana, firearms freedom, and anti-Real ID endeavors, the anti-healthcare reform effort is lopsidedly partisan. Opposition is almost entirely Republican, which may explain why Fox News is promot-

ing this cause while remaining silent on the others. Another difference is that resistance to Obamacare is being carried out through lawsuits in federal courts by a handful of top state-level politicians, rather than by declarations and defiance by the people and their legislators *en masse*.

Examples of direct nullification attempts are still rare. One is the recently adopted Virginia Health Care Freedom Act, which prevents the federal government from requiring mandatory insurance coverage. In 2009, a state sovereignty resolution overwhelmingly passed both chambers of the Tennessee legislature. Although relatively toothless, it did mark the first time a state sovereignty resolution had been signed by a governor. Alaska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, and Oklahoma have passed similar resolutions.

The author of the Tennessee resolution, state Rep. Susan Lynn, had healthcare reform in mind when she announced last December that she would introduce stronger legislation to declare null and void any federal law deemed unconstitutional by the state. Prospects of passage are not good—it’s one thing to pass a symbolic resolution, quite another to claim the power of nullification. Glen Casada, a leading conservative Republican in the state house, told a reporter, “Susan’s a sharp girl, but I don’t know. I didn’t realize states had that right to nullify specific laws passed by the federal government.”

Ignorance of nullification is not confined to the political class. With their focus on hot-button issues of immediate concern, few modern reformers are even aware of the historical context. But nullification has roots in an honorable tradition and a powerful legacy of curbing centralized power.

In 1798, the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions were secretly written and advanced by Vice President Thomas Jef-

ferson and his ally in the House of Representatives, James Madison, to encourage resistance to the Alien and Sedition Acts. Jefferson and Madison grounded their resolutions in the compact theory, which sees the Constitution as an agreement between the states. In the Kentucky Resolution, Jefferson asserted that state governments have a right to interpret the Constitution, arguing, “[T]he government created by this compact was not made the exclusive or final *judge* of the extent of the powers delegated to itself.”

His original draft included an explicit mention of nullification: “Where powers are assumed which have not been delegated, a nullification of the act is the rightful remedy.” The final version, enacted by the legislature, did not contain the word “nullification,” but ended with the same thought, calling on other states to join Kentucky in “declaring these acts void and of no force.”

The Virginia Resolution, written by Madison, was guided through the legislature by John Taylor of Caroline. When powers not granted by the compact between the states are dangerously exercised by the federal government, Madison argued, states “have the right, and are in duty bound, to interpose for arresting the progress of the evil.” Always more conservative than Jefferson, Madison had the language declaring the Alien and Sedition Acts “void, and of no force or effect” removed from the final version approved by the legislature—but declaring the federal laws to be “unconstitutional” clearly implied nullification.

While the New England states rejected nullification in 1799, viewing it as a harbinger of insurrection and civil war, this bastion of Federalists changed its tune when President Jefferson pursued policies not to its liking eight years later. The state governments of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island

threatened to ignore the Embargo Act of 1807 because of its perceived unconstitutionality.

The War of 1812 was also unpopular in New England, and states officially resisted federal authority to mobilize their militias and enforce a new embargo act. The assembly of Connecticut urged non-compliance as “a FREE SOVEREIGN and INDEPENDENT state.” In 1814, the General Court of Massachusetts invoked “the sovereignty reserved to the states,” opining, “Whenever the national compact is violated, and the citizens of this State are oppressed by cruel and unauthorized laws, this Legislature is bound to interpose its power, and wrest from the oppressor its victim.”

THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD WAS AN EXAMPLE OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AGAINST THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, A TYPE OF “PERSONAL NULLIFICATION.”

Toward the end of the war, radical “blue light” Federalists were calling for secession from the Union. Gov. Caleb Strong of Massachusetts began secret negotiations with the British government to effect a peace treaty with the state. Delegates from five New England states met for the Hartford Convention, which in addition to proposing constitutional amendments declared that the region had a duty to resist unconstitutional violations of state sovereignty.

Federalist opposition to political centralization during the War of 1812 was not completely opportunistic. The Constitution was a dramatic strengthening of the central government compared to the Articles of Confederation, but it still promised a federal system—not a unitary or consolidated one. The Supremacy Clause of the Constitution refers to the founding document and to federal laws and treaties as “the supreme Law of the Land.” Yet the Tenth Amendment provides that the “powers not delegated to

the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

The federal balance between the Supremacy Clause and the Tenth Amendment was maintained as long as each level of government stuck to its constitutional areas of concern. But that equilibrium has shifted as federal power has intruded into areas reserved to the states. Beginning with the Marshall court in the early 19th century, with its invention of the non-constitutional power of judicial review and its creative use of constitutional loopholes, the judiciary facilitated this imbalance. By the early 1820s, it was clear that states’ rights

were being largely ignored by all three branches of the federal government.

Unlike Thomas Jefferson, John C. Calhoun was not a democrat, egalitarian, or libertarian. Jefferson was motivated by concern for civil liberties and popular control of government. The South Carolinian Calhoun was primarily interested in protecting slave-based plantation society. In some ways reprising the role of Jefferson with the Kentucky Resolution, Calhoun secretly advocated nullification 30 years later. When the Tariff of Abominations was enacted by Congress in 1828, it became the highest tariff in U.S. history. Outrage swept the South, and Calhoun published an anonymous booklet, *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*, that touted nullification.

Incoming President Andrew Jackson was a Jeffersonian who supported states’ rights, but he also supported the Union and did not see the high tariff as a violation of the Constitution. The con-

flict between President Jackson and Vice President Calhoun would continue for four years. In 1832, South Carolina adopted the Ordinance of Nullification against a new tariff. In reaction, Congress authorized the president to use force to ensure federal law was executed in the states. South Carolina then nullified the Force Bill, but a lower, compromise tariff passed the same day. This allowed the state to rescind its nullification, thus averting an armed crisis.

More representative of the Jeffersonian tradition was use of nullification by the abolitionist movement. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 required the return of escaped slaves, even when they were caught in free states. The law sparked anti-slavery defiance of the federal government and its pro-slavery policies. Four years after passage, the Wisconsin Supreme Court declared the fugitive law unconstitutional. In 1859, the Wisconsin legislature quoted from Jefferson’s Kentucky Resolution in its proclamation condemning the “Bloodhound Law.”

Massachusetts also embraced nullification, making it illegal for state officials to enforce the fugitive law. Other northern states joined in enacting personal liberty laws that prevented federal officials from using local jails and hindered enforcement in other ways. The Underground Railroad itself was a large-scale example of civil disobedience against the federal government, a type of “personal nullification.”

Unfortunately, mid-20th-century examples of nullification tended to center around the sectional and racial politics associated with Calhoun, not the freedom and equality causes of Jefferson and the abolitionists. Nullification resolutions were adopted by Virginia and Florida in the 1950s after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation in the public schools. Martin Luther King Jr. pointed to the subject in his famous speech of

1963: "I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama, with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification ... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers." By their loud but opportunistic use of states' rights as a tool to advance their economic and racial interests, generations of slaveowners and segregationists tainted the concept in the public mind.

But now nullification is back—under a much broader banner. Bestselling author Thomas Woods's latest book, *Nullification*, will be released by Regnery this summer and promises to bring Jefferson's ideas to a wide modern audience. A recent Rasmussen survey revealed that 59 percent of likely voters say that states should have the right to opt out of federal programs. Only 25 percent disagreed.

Predictably, when the masses begin to raise noisy objection to the status quo, the power structure reacts. Princeton historian Sean Wilentz's nullification article in *The New Republic* is accompanied by a picture of Calhoun, who makes a more convenient bogeyman than Jefferson, still a favorite of liberals. Wilentz writes, "The idea was broached most vociferously in defense of the slave South by John C. Calhoun in the 1820s and '30s, extended by the Confederate secessionists in the 1850s and '60s, then forcefully reclaimed by militant segregationists in the 1950s and '60s." Nothing about tariffs or abolitionists defending runaway slaves. Nary a trace of marijuana or chemotherapy. The media demands a soundbite, and respectable liberals provide one: nullification is all about race hatred.

In the current political climate, the distinct message and heritage of nullification has been overshadowed by radicals drunk on tea. But to be effective in changing the role of government in our

lives, it's not enough to fear Barack Hussein Obama and call Democrats ugly names. If Tea Partiers and state sovereigntists are informed and honest, they will recognize that there is no substantive difference between Romney-care and Obamacare, between Republican posers and Democratic phonies. It's a bipartisan racket of federal overreach, deficit spending, ungodly values, and imperial arrogance. Obama is not going to confiscate our guns because he has other concerns: he has to keep his Wall Street patrons happy. They don't care if you own a semiautomatic or a water pistol, as long as the Federal Reserve and Treasury Department continue to cater to their every desire. Same with the military contractors vis-à-vis the Pentagon and State Department.

I live in the Heart of Dixie—Calhoun County, Alabama—and I can attest that bread and circuses have taken their toll on even the most patriotic and tradi-

tional among us. There is more enthusiasm for Nick Saban than Tom Jefferson. More folks are watching 'Bama than reading the Bill of Rights. More are trying to protect electronic bingo than freedom of speech.

We the People are angry at Washington, but we don't understand how the system works and are too easily fooled by self-serving politicians and media puppeteers. They keep us ignorant while they tell us how to feel. Perhaps the first step is to turn off the television. Read. Look beyond rhetoric. Follow the money. Organize locally. Talk to your neighbors—even those with whom you disagree. We might find some common ground and useful ideas that will bring not just heat but light. ■

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Don't Blame Fascism

Neocons misuse the f-word.

By Paul Gottfried

BEHIND GLENN BECK loomed the faces of Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger, and the American progressive John Dewey. The host gestured to the photos as he revealed the common link to Fox viewers: all favored state intervention in the economy and apparently did not believe in the concept of natural rights as found in the Declaration of Independence. Thus all of them flirted with fascism.

To drive home this point, Beck had invited Jonah Goldberg, author of *Liberal Fascism*, on to his program. Goldberg sees ominous connections between the economic corporatist Mussolini and the shenanigans of the current Democratic administration. To him, Hillary Clinton's notion that it takes a village to raise a child resembles nothing so much as the policies of Hitler's head of the German Labor Front, Robert Ley. This evidently Nazi-esque rhetoric

comes to Hillary by way of her longtime advisor Michael Lerner, a Jewish leftist. Like the Nazis, Lerner and presumably Hillary believe that “morality, politics, economics and ethics: none of these things can be separated from anything else.” Indeed, the welfare-state policies advocated by Lerner, according to Goldberg, look as if they were lifted from the Nazi platform of 1920.

Nor is that all: the vegetarian and ecological concerns of many Democrats seem similar to the beliefs of interwar fascists and Nazis. Hitler and Himmler prefigured these contemporary American fashions, Goldberg warns, as he notes that “many on the left talk about destroying whiteness in a way that is reminiscent of the National Socialist effort to de-Judaize German society.” To anyone else the difference between these situations might seem obvious: while Hitler’s plan was directed at a generally helpless minority in his country, the anti-white posturing of American journalists and educators is an acquired taste among the predominantly white elite.

But Beck and his guest are hardly the only movement conservatives who perceive a world fascist threat. Rudy Giuliani remains at war with “Islamofascism.” Other Fox News luminaries, such as Charles Krauthammer, Sean Hannity, and Fred Barnes, are preoccupied with the same demon. Norman Podhoretz’s *World War IV* is not surprisingly subtitled *The Long Struggle against Islamofascism*. Given these weighty authorities, it seems that fascism is America’s #1 enemy.

Fascists, real or imagined, have long been the European Left’s preferred opponents. The f-word in Europe is directed against all who stand in the way of further gay and feminist rights or unlimited Third World immigration. Anyone on the wrong side of these issues is labeled a fascist, which really means Hitler. The Left is perennially

fighting Nazis in the form of any position or figure deemed insufficiently progressive. And now American neoconservatives are getting in on the fun, but with a twist: just as European leftists are convinced that anyone concerned about historic nations and traditional morality is a fascist, so neocons are equally sure that fascism is fundamentally a left-wing phenomenon.

They’re all wrong. While conservatives are not fascists, as the Left would have it, neither are fascists leftists, as Goldberg and company believe.

There were in fact different fascisms in the 1920s and 1930s, and they were not always on the same side. As late as 1934, the Italian fascist leader Mussolini tried to come to the aid of the Austrian clerical fascist Engelbert Dollfuss, whom Hitler’s henchmen in Vienna finally assassinated. Not all fascists were racists or especially anti-Semitic, and until the Axis agreement was reached in 1936, it did not seem that Hitler and Mussolini would be on the same side in any future war.

Mussolini, who in 1922 became the first fascist to take over a European government, claimed to represent and embody a “national revolution,” not a single class—such as the Italian proletariat—let alone the “workers of the world.” Although *Il Duce* had once been an avowed man of the Left, the authoritarian government he constructed within what looked like a vestigial constitutional monarchy was not notably socialist once installed, although it claimed that all things were being done in the name of the state. Mussolini, as Goldberg correctly observes, had many admirers throughout the political spectrum, including the Black Nationalist Marcus Garvey, the Revisionist Zionist Zeev Jabotinsky, and at least half the editorial board of *The New Republic*, which viewed him as a progressive state planner. Not until Mussolini’s entirely unex-

pected alliance with the Nazis did world opinion turn against him—including the judgment of his erstwhile fans Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

Garden-variety fascisms—in contrast to the partly Stalinized German Nazi form—were counterrevolutionary in character. The German historian Ernst Nolte describes the fascists as a “counter-revolutionary imitation of the Left.” Fascist movements mobilized masses and made deals with the working class, but what allowed them to come to power was their armed opposition to the revolutionary Left. They flourished in countries with large anarchist and Communist movements. And while they promised national revolutions that would rise above selfish bourgeois interests and parliamentary squabbles, fascism relied, particularly in Italy, France, and Spain, on the support of a frightened bourgeoisie.

The fascists became the party of order. In Austria, the Jewish classical liberal Ludwig von Mises declared for the Catholic corporatist Right against the socialist revolutionary Left, which the clerical fascists were then keeping at bay. In the 1930s, European Communists targeted fascism as an especially insidious enemy. What they meant was not first of all Hitlerism—which Stalin in fact directed German Communists to assist in coming to power—but movements like Mussolini’s. Even then the Communists and their allies correctly viewed the fascists as sham revolutionaries, who introduced only minor welfare measures once they came to power. In contrast to the dreams of the Left, the fascist revolution stressed hierarchy and the glorification of one’s nation and its antecedents. While the Left took from the French Revolution a model for sweeping social reform, the Italian fascists admired the Revolution’s appeal to classical antiquity and military heroism.

So why do so many movement conservatives today call everyone they dislike

“fascists”? There are four reasons. First, this rhetorical weapon allows self-styled conservatives to have some fun by applying to the other side a pejorative term that the Left has had a monopoly on. Such a tactic may be emotionally satisfying, but it is intellectually bankrupt. Only a cultural illiterate could believe that interwar fascists were intent on pursuing a massive welfare state centered on the achievement of social equality, with special protection for racial minorities, feminists, alternative lifestyles, and whatever else the latter-day Left is about. Republicans and Democrats share more of this agenda with each other than either does with interwar fascists.

America’s major parties support a far more economically intrusive government than any that Dollfuss, Mussolini,

ments. These writers made the unwarranted leap from thinking that all forms of economic planning were unacceptable to believing that all were virtually identical. It is true that FDR, his Brain Trusters, and much of the American Left found a great deal to admire in Mussolini’s experiments. But so too did conservative Catholics, who often professed admiration for European fascists’ cultivation of good relations with the Church and the middle way they sought to forge between plutocracy and socialism. Not incidentally, U.S. antifascist critics of the New Deal tended to be American-style libertarians. They had a very limited understanding of the European Right or the European Left and usually threw “statists” of all kinds into the same rogues’ gallery.

ONLY A CULTURAL ILLITERATE COULD BELIEVE THAT INTERWAR FASCISTS WERE INTENT ON PURSUING A MASSIVE WELFARE STATE.

or other non-Nazi right-wing corporatists tried to put into operation between the world wars. Until the outbreak of World War II, the Italian fascist government took a smaller percentage of income from families than American households are now required to fork over to our regime. Equally important, the Italian fascist state never attempted to manage gender relations and conversations about ethnicity. Unlike the politically correct postmodern state, it left social relations pretty much the same as they had been before.

The second reason for the American Right’s anti-fascist rhetoric is historical. Some critics of FDR and the New Deal, such as Garrett Garet, Isabel Paterson, and John T. Flynn, believed that the American welfare state was the equivalent of the Italian fascist and later German Nazi regimes. But there is no reason to yield to their flawed judg-

Much of today’s talk about fascism derives from a third motive—a thinly disguised *reductio ad Hitlerum*. Whenever Krauthammer or Giuliani brings up “Islamofascism,” we are being reminded that the enemies of Israel are like the Nazis. These enemies, it is implied, seek to inflict on the Israelis and the entire Jewish people what the earlier “fascist” Hitler almost succeeded in doing. The word “fascist” is meant to summon everyone to action against an implacable, existential military threat to the Israelis.

But the final and most fundamental reason for the establishment Right’s antifascist pretensions is a deeply rooted leftist mindset in which fascism remains the world’s greatest evil. In the 1980s, neo-conservatives came to control the American conservative movement in what was mostly a friendly takeover. Conservative foundations and journals began sliding toward the Left, and in the new pantheon

of conservative heroes one found such previously unlikely figures as Harry Truman, Woodrow Wilson, Abraham Lincoln, and eventually Martin Luther King.

The reconstructed Right continued to be anti-Soviet and generally anti-Communist. But while the post-World War II Right typically denounced the Communists as godless materialists striving for absolute equality, neoconservatives became anti-Communist for different reasons. They stood in the tradition of such Cold War liberals and pro-labor Democrats as Sen. Scoop Jackson and AFL-CIO leader George Meany. The anti-Communist Left condemned the Soviets as oppressors of the proletariat and counterrevolutionaries posing as socialists.

In the neoconservative version of anti-Communism, the enemy remained on the Right. The Soviet dictatorship became what Truman described after World War II as “Red Fascism.” This was also the way the German socialist Kurt Schumacher defined the new enemy after 1945, when he denounced the “red lacquered Nazis.” Unlike the old anti-Communist diatribes in *National Review*, *Human Events*, and *Modern Age*, later neoconservative anti-Communism, as Sam Francis once observed, gives evidence of a “leftist gestalt.” The present “conservative” struggle shows the same gestalt, as it battles the recycled menace of interwar fascism.

Antifascist neocons are in fact far to the left of characters like Mussolini. The ghosts haunting American politics are not the specters of Heidegger or Hitler lurking behind Obama and Mrs. Clinton. They are the spirits of old anti-Stalinists like Trotsky that now possess the establishment Right. ■

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People of the Book

Why do libertarians produce better literature than conservatives?

By Brian Doherty

AFTER GIFTING US with such lists as the top 50 conservative rock songs, this year *National Review* offered, under the guidance of political reporter John J. Miller, the “Ten Great Conservative Novels” of the postwar era.

Miller is a literature buff whose tastes are more inclusive of pop and genre fiction than were those of such highbrow conservative lit gurus as Irving Babbitt or T.S. Eliot. The novels *NR* selected, though, were all by reputable novelists, some with known conservative sympathies, some not. Their themes promote such modern conservative ideas as the evils of the Soviets, the counterculture’s erosion of proper culture, and the technological destruction of human nature.

National Review presented them not to celebrate a recognized right-wing canon, but to promote works of likely interest for conservatives craving ideological sympathy. As Miller told me, “I do think conservatives respond to art in certain kinds of ways and certain kinds of messages resonate with them. I’m not talking about propaganda, but about insight into human nature and shared worldviews—and a sense when reading this book that you are among friends or someone you can learn from.”

But when Miller sought suggestions for the list on his blog, various commenters protested that the project was unconservative in principle: Stalinists were the ones who had to categorize art politically. Someone who calls himself “Das” noted, “If a novel just plays out and lets life unfold I believe conservatives can claim it as a conservative

novel. Why? Conservatives invest themselves in life not politics. ... Conservatives don’t grind axes in art, they just let life play out.”

Now, it is true that conservatives have generally avoided the totalitarian temptation to squeeze everything into a political mold. But they have also managed to avoid the creative arts in the formation and shaping of their ideas—this despite their movement’s self-appointed reputation as keeper of the canons of Western culture.

Fiction is nearly absent in the offerings of the Conservative Book Club. The institutions and periodicals on the Right most dedicated to *belles lettres*, such as the Intercollegiate Studies Institute and *Modern Age*, are the most obscure outposts on the conservative frontier. The conservative godfather who most strongly advocated literary roots for political thought, Russell Kirk, is on a long downhill slide in influence while Sarah Palin rises.

The modern Right’s most popular contribution to humane letters, movement apparatchik William Bennett’s bestselling 1990s compilation *The Book of Virtues*—bits of prose and poetry meant to slam home lessons about self-discipline, honesty, work, and faith—might seem on the surface to fill Kirk’s bill. But that devotee of Eliot, Faulkner, and Waugh had his sights set on work that was more complicated, less reducible to an easily labeled fable. Kirk thought literature could deliver not just potted lessons but help us “perceive, beyond mere appearances, a hierarchy

of worth and certain enduring truths ... drawn from centuries of human experience.” Literature’s role in the cultivation of the moral imagination, Kirk wrote, is to transmit “to successive rising generations ... a body of ethical principles and critical standards and imaginative creations that constitutes a kind of collective intellect of humanity.” As Kirk scholar Donald Atwell Zoll put it, “central to Kirk’s social and political commentary was the conviction that ethical and normative truths are often best conveyed through a symbolic veil, as found, for example, in the medium of great poetry, rather than by the means of discursive explication.”

One important American political movement did find a huge part of its core understanding of “ethical and normative truths” conveyed not through “great poetry” in the traditional sense, but at any rate through imaginative literature. It included such marvelously entertaining pulpy hugger-mugger as a genius who invents an impossible energy-generating machine that shuts down a corrupt statist government, which tries to fight back with a death ray built by a mad scientist. Then there were the Moon rebels tossing giant rocks down on a repressive earth government to win their independence.

That movement is libertarianism, which unlike conservatism in its popular sense has deep roots in imaginative fiction—though not literature of the quality that Kirk, himself an author of genre fiction in the gothic horror vein, tended to promote. Libertarians’ literary

heroes are Ayn Rand and Robert Heinlein, whose *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* are respectively referenced above.

Over the years, right-wing thinkers have claimed novelists from James Fenimore Cooper to today's Tom Wolfe. But finding conservative activists who avow direct inspiration from them for launching their ideological lives would be quite a trick. In contrast, many, perhaps even most, movement libertarians of the 1960s-90s generation would have no problem admitting influence from works of fiction. While other novels, particularly the anarchistic *Illuminatus!* by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, have their devotees, Rand and Heinlein and their occasional epigones rule the literary libertarian roost.

Why is libertarianism more fictionally attuned than conservatism? Conservatives have had, especially in the past generation, more real-world accomplishments in politics and media for adherents to glom onto for inspiration. Perceiving themselves as closer to worldly power than libertarians can, young Republicans can locate living heroes. Who needs the emotional support and intellectual stimulation of the literary imagination when you can see the world you want either in the near pre-Obama past or in a future that's just a GOP electoral victory away? While traditional conservatism is historically rooted in many literary traditions and themes from the Greek and Roman classics to Shakespeare to the New Humanists and Southern Agrarians of the early 20th century, modern conservatism has become too much of politics to think much of art.

Libertarianism, by contrast, has remained something for which imagination is appropriate and necessary. The 20th century provided little useful fodder for contemplating the world as it should be from a libertarian perspective—what

Is anyone wondering what happened to all the pastel revolutions managed by the meddlers at the National Endowment for Democracy?

The orange variety in Ukraine has turned turtle with pro-Russian president Viktor Yuschenko back in control. And there are questions being asked about missing money, including \$350 million that Ukraine received from the sale of Kyoto Protocol credits to the Japanese. The money was last seen in the hands of former prime minister and Western media darling Yulia Tymoshenko. An audit is underway in an attempt to determine the final disposition of the cash.

In neighboring Georgia, the Rose Revolution has also withered. The claim made by U.S. presidential candidate John McCain that "we are all Georgians" has particular resonance now as Tbilisi has decided that no government official can any longer hold dual nationality. Georgian Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili, a major advocate of the aggressive policy that led to disaster, was also an Israeli citizen, as was another cabinet minister. And there were also French and Russian citizens at senior levels in the government.

There are also reports that the U.S. Department of Justice has launched a major investigation into massive fraud involving several billion dollars in American military assistance to Georgia prior to the war. The books of a number of Israeli and U.S.-based companies are being examined. Training of Georgian units by Israeli contractors was sometimes so perfunctory that the men did not even learn how to fire their rifles. But not to worry, the Pentagon is rearming the Georgians and will no doubt use the same contractors in hopes that the result will be different.



The White House is re-evaluating the CIA-run Predator drone program

in the wake of the attempted Times Square bombing, which may have been motivated by the civilian death toll in Pakistan. Very few high-level terrorists have been killed by drones, and there is a growing perception that the negative press from civilian deaths has far exceeded any gain from the operations. Insurgents have reportedly adjusted to the attacks, and it has become so difficult to find and shoot at actual militants that the targets are now largely "infrastructure," meaning buildings and vehicles that the Taliban or al-Qaeda might be using. When one of these is hit, civilians most often constitute the bulk of the casualties. There are no reliable statistics on who is actually being killed. The Pakistani army frequently reports that many of the victims of the airstrikes are "militants," but that judgment frequently derives from the postmortem identification of someone carrying a rifle in a region where all males over the age of 13 normally do.

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the Russian-born novelist and philosopher Ayn Rand believed was the purpose of literature. But the Obama age has created a fresh wave of fascination with Rand's dystopia, as thousands hear echoes in daily headlines of her novels' world of government takeovers of major industries, distribution of economic power via political pull rather than market success, and elevation of a feckless compassion above reason and reality. Want to see the real damage that fashionable leftist attitudes against the libertarian version of individualism can have on the human soul? Read Rand's saga of two philosophically opposed architects and their respective rises, falls, and rises, *The Fountainhead*.

After Rand, the most prominent literary influence on the movement's adherents has been Robert Heinlein—a living example of that grotesque yet exciting science-fiction vision: the man with two heads. He was a peculiar mix, half Goldwaterite, with his ferocious individualism, admiration for the virtues and accomplishments of rugged frontiersmen, and belief in a foreign menace to our way of life that needed to be defeated by any means necessary, short of the slavery of the draft. See, for the most vivid example of this side of Heinlein, his 1959 novel *Starship Troopers*, in which a sometimes despised brave minority of soldiers keeps a culture free and safe from alien bugs (read: communists).

But Heinlein was also half iconoclastic libertine hippie. He advocated the harsh and comic questioning of tribal mores and celebrated the evasion of everyday taboos by an enlightened elite in his most popular novel, 1961's *Stranger in a Strange Land*. It involved a beatific free-love cult started by a human raised by Martians and provided for many of its readers—including, alas, some members of the Manson family—a morally imaginative glimpse into the

living out of less traditional ways of dealing with family, tribe, and sex.

By allowing readers of *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* to inhabit a world where “rational anarchist” philosophers could team up with supercompetent and superattractive men and women to conquer tyranny and establish a world where taxing people for things they didn't personally support was just not done, Heinlein became a hero to many young libertarians, including David Nolan, the founder of the Libertarian Party, and Robert Poole Jr., the founder of the Reason Foundation (whose magazine, *Reason*, I work for).

But the very nature of libertarianism's largest literary influences could seem to damn a movement thus guided. Those dedicated to the traditional humanities could easily condemn Rand and Heinlein as unworthy of serious attention. They both wrote unequivocally unrealistic works that were driven more by plot and theme than character. Heinlein's novels are unabashed science fiction, involving aliens and extraterrestrial living. Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* was essentially science fiction as well, requiring a super-science gimmick for its plot and climax. But if these classics fail in terms of prose or characterization to live up to the highest standards of non-genre literature, it could be argued that in fantastic circumstances we can most vividly contemplate the possibilities of counter-realistic politics.

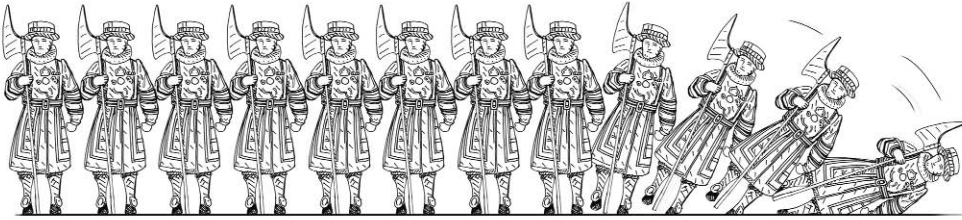
The major reason libertarianism has a firm base in literature—even popular literature—that conservatism lacks comes down to a purity of ideas and goals. Libertarianism is still a project, essentially, of the moral imagination, and one with a unity of purpose. Conservatism, meanwhile, has become a project of electoral wrangling. As a political coalition more than a set of agreed theory, conservatism has enough variance to fit passionate anti-interventionist poet Robin-

son Jeffers and neocon editorialist Mark Helprin uncomfortably under the same umbrella. You see Southern Agrarians, thought of as conservative heroes by some intellectuals, defending an anti-industrialism that is nowhere to be found in the effective modern political and media Right. That may seem to show the promise of a worldview that is bigger, wiser, more complicated than libertarian simplicities; in fact, it suggests a movement that has lost philosophical cohesion in pursuit of real-world success.

Gregory Wolfe is a man of letters from a right-wing movement background who now edits the literary journal *Image*. He reminds us that however difficult crafting a culture that will influence society in salubrious directions may be, it's still vital to try. “Political battles are shaped by the stories we tell, the symbols that are the most living and vibrant in experience,” he says. And if a novel can help people imagine and feel the vitality of personal responsibility, for example, “when people end up debating tax policy, what their understanding of human nature is and how that understanding was nurtured brings them to talk about it in certain ways.”

Conservatism is no longer about a subtle and coherent understanding of the human soul, but about running the modern state and winning influence for that purpose. Governance ought to require a great deal of refined moral imagination. But those most obsessed with gaining power are least likely to have a sense of humane width or even to understand its importance. That's the sort of irony about which any number of nuanced and enriching works of literature could be written. ■

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Two Cheers for Cameron

My oldest boy is a gardener and writer and an arts-and-crafts, pre-Raphaelite, Keir Hardy, Dorothy Day conservative socialist or, depending on mood and

season, radical traditionalist. He does not like town. He does not like chain stores. He never goes to Starbucks or McDonald's. He does not like automobiles but travels by train whenever he can and would go by horse if he had a horse (and knew one end from the other).

That is not to say that he and I agree on absolutely everything. "I'm enjoying the parliamentary anarchy," he wrote to me when our general election had resulted in a hung Parliament. "It will be business as usual soon enough, I expect, but with the Tories at the wheel. The rich getting richer and the poor getting stuffed and Old England sliding ever more into celebrity-obsessed banality."

Come now, I said. The Tories aren't all bad, and there was certainly more celebrity-obsessed banality under Tony Blair and his "Cool Britannia" than there had been under that nice John Major, the last Tory prime minister.

He wasn't having any of it. "No," he replied, "the current celebrity obsession began in the mid/early nineties and flourished on Major's watch. Blair carried on in the same dumbed-down vein and the High Streets of Britain continued the decline that had begun with Thatcher. When the morals and values of a society are dictated by the markets, then God help us."

On markets and their corrupting influence conservatives agree. Anything is permitted now, provided it turns a profit and is not sexist, racist, homophobic, or likely to encourage the enjoyment of tobacco. Even so, I thought my son was perhaps being a little Manichean.

But who cares? Manichean, Shmanichean. Here's the real scoop: amid all the political excitement, my boy—did I forget to say that he is 41?—presented me with an astonishingly brave, intelligent, and handsome grandson. I already have two beautiful granddaughters, but a grandson has a special place in an old man's heart because it means the continuation of the line, someone eventually to inherit one's debts.

In the middle of May, when my grandson was 10 days old, we went down to the country to introduce ourselves. My son and my daughter-in-law live on the outskirts of an absurdly pretty village in the Cotswolds, not far from a market town where people use willow shopping baskets instead of plastic bags, and you can buy homemade sausages, damson and quince wine, gourmet garlic, Cotswold brie, and organic beef, organic milk, organic bread, and organic copies of the *Guardian*.

For lunch we had fish pie and bread-and-butter pudding with custard. We talked about the new coalition government, the first since World War II. It was less than a week since David Cameron and Nick Clegg had joined hands in holy expediency to form perhaps the most liberal administration ever to achieve power in the United Kingdom. No sooner had the two men—now prime minister and deputy prime minister—given their inaugural press conference in the garden of 10 Downing Street than the grumblers, the cranks, the naysayers, the superannuated hangmen, and the pinched and narrow

obscurantists, not to mention the scholars in residence at *National Review*, all cried foul.

Most nice people, however, wished the happy couple well. According to a poll conducted for the *Sunday Telegraph*, 64 percent of Britons thought the coalition was the right way forward, and among those who had voted Tory, 87 percent backed the Clegg/Cameron alliance.

All of us at the table were with the majority in welcoming the new deal. Already it has undertaken to scrap ID cards and other excesses of the security state and promises to reduce taxes for the poorest. We are not all in agreement, however, about the long-term solution to our problems. My boy thought it lay in adopting some form of the feudal system, but with plumbing. The people of England were happy, he believes, when they worked the land on behalf of the nobility. It was an ideal life, free from wants, in harmony with the seasons and of the liturgical calendar. What more could anyone want?

Freedom, said my wife, who is an American.

It is anyway hard to believe that British politics can ever be the same again. When proportional representation is introduced, as it probably will be, coalition governments will be the norm, as they are in the more civilized parts of Europe. David Cameron, meanwhile, must be relieved by the outcome. He is a Tory Whig, and now he is out of the closet and where, as an Old Etonian, he belongs: at the head of the liberal elite. He and Nick are natural bedfellows. I'd no more vote for them than I would for any other gang of pro-choice pols, but they are the best we could have hoped for under the circumstances. ■

Arts & Letters

BOOKS

[*Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One*, Zev Chafets, Sentinel, 240 pages]

The Voice of the Right

By Austin Bramwell

BY NOW BOTH the liberal and the conservative critiques of talk radio have become familiar. Liberals say it coarsens our political discourse, caters to listeners' worst instincts, and stirs hostility to gays, women, and minorities. Some conservatives say it alienates moderates and independents, blinds fans to the faults of Republicans (especially former President George W. Bush), and crowds out high-minded intellectual conservatism. Opinion-mongers of many persuasions agree: right-wing talk radio is bad for conservatism and bad for America.

Like it or not, it is here to stay. The man who popularized the format, Rush Limbaugh, has had the top-rated radio talk show for more than 20 years, a record that puts him among the most successful broadcasters in mass-media history. In his sympathetic new biography, *Rush Limbaugh: An Army of One*, Zev Chafets argues that Limbaugh is also a major political force. In just the past two years, Limbaugh has disrupted and prolonged the Democratic presidential primary, dissuaded wavering GOP congressmen from compromising with

President Obama, and helped elect a Republican to Ted Kennedy's former Senate seat. Chafets calls Limbaugh the "dominant Republican voice" and says he has "undisputed control of the conservative movement." He warns, "You underestimate or ignore him at your peril."

Yet for all his admiration, Chafets is strangely incurious about his subject. For one thing, he does not bother to find out how and when the host became interested in politics. Limbaugh landed his first job as a disc jockey at age 17, dropped out of college two years later, and spent the next couple of decades in and out of radio gigs. Only as a veteran DJ—if not dangerously close to a has-been—did Limbaugh start to talk politics, on or off the air. Says one friend and fan, "I had no idea he knew anything about it." Then, as Chafets flatly describes it, an AM station in Kansas City hired him and "for the first time, he began openly expressing his conservative opinions on the air." Of Limbaugh's momentous decision to create a political radio show, *Army of One* reports nothing further.

Limbaugh's apparent lack of intellectual formation suits his own purposes. "The USA is the greatest nation," wrote Limbaugh in his first book, "not because Americans are inherently superior but because its government was founded on principles which seek to allow maximum individual achievement." In other words, Limbaughism is nothing more than Americanism; all you need to understand his political principles is a proper civics lesson. It's not true, of course. Limbaughism, like any other ideology, rests on a selective reading of history.

Limbaugh's own grandfather, a Missouri assemblyman, was a 1936 delegate to the Republican National Convention, while his father, a prominent local lawyer, gave speeches railing against Communists and liberals. They saw American history as the story of how the nation's founding principles were corrupted by later reformers. Without knowing that story in advance, Limbaugh could no more have discerned his principles in the pool of American history than Atlantis through the surface of the Western Ocean.

How politics came to preoccupy him after a lifetime of indifference Chafets does not say. Limbaugh later confessed that he did not even read *National Review*—the lodestar of conservative opinion for his generation—until after he became famous. Perhaps by some accident, Limbaugh discovered that his family's politics made good material for monologues, then immersed himself for the first time in news and opinion, and conservative talk radio was born. However it was, readers will have to wait for the next biography to find out.

Chafets, whose book began as a *New York Times Magazine* profile, has more to say about Limbaugh's life today. The gap between his wealth and his social standing is striking. Unlike his late friend William F. Buckley Jr., who held court every day with the good and the great, Limbaugh has shunned and been shunned by the media elite—though with an annual income equivalent to that of a multi-billionaire, he's immensely wealthier than Buckley was. He seems little changed from the man whose first marriage fell apart because, according to Chafets, he preferred to "stay home,

snack and watch sports on TV, or tinker with electronic equipment.” Limbaugh now has a lot more to tinker with: a private jet, a fleet of black Maybachs, and five beachfront houses in Palm Beach (the largest is 24,000 square feet). His main mansion’s furnishings are admirably gauche, replete with full suits of medieval armor, a replica of the Biltmore estate library, and a chandelier modeled after the one from the Plaza Hotel. But he is today, as he was as a teenager, most comfortable alone in a studio, talking into a microphone.

A happy man like Limbaugh rarely makes for interesting biography. Chafets focuses instead on Limbaugh’s political influence. He marvels at how many times his subject has made the news recently. In just the past two years, Hillary Clinton, David Letterman, Rahm Emanuel, “Saturday Night Live,” *The New Yorker*, the hostess of the White House Correspondents’ Association dinner, and the president himself have all done their part to inflate Limbaugh’s importance. He has become “a full-fledged media obsession.”

As an apology for Limbaugh and his influence, *Army of One* is partially (though not wholly) successful. Start with the first item of the liberal critique, that Limbaugh appeals to resentful listeners’ “worst instincts.” One professor whom Chafets quotes calls Limbaugh’s audience “embittered and battered” fools looking for someone to blame “for the mess of their own tiny, dead-end lives.” In fact, Limbaugh’s audience ranks higher in education and political knowledge than that of almost any other program, including high-minded news shows such as “PBS NewsHour” and arch satire such as “The Colbert Report.” Despite stereotypes, Limbaugh’s 20 million listeners are, objectively speaking, some of the most sophisticated in the country.

That a highly ideological program should also have a highly knowledgeable audience is not surprising. Political consumers are “rationally irrational”: that is, they do not gather political information in order to have correct opinions, but rather to root for one side and denounce

the other. Limbaugh’s show answers their cravings, but with more wit than usually acknowledged. Take, for example, the notorious “Barack the Magic Negro” parody song set to the tune of “Puff the Magic Dragon.” “Barack the Magic Negro lives in D.C.,” croaks an Al Sharpton impersonator. “The *L.A. Times*, they called him that cause he’s not authentic like me.” Predictably, the media called the parody “controversial.” All they heard was a white conservative making fun of blacks.

Limbaugh’s audience, however, knew that the joke was really on white liberals. After Obama threatened to undermine their conviction that America was too racist to elect a black president, David Ehrenstein of the *Los Angeles Times* dutifully came forth with the theory of the “magic negro”: Obama made whites swoon because he was black yet unthreatening. In other words, Obama’s very success shows how deep-seated America’s racism really is. Lampooning this theory, “Barack the Magic Negro” takes it one step forward: if *L.A. Times* readers truly want to be racially enlightened, they should vote against the black candidate! Even Al Sharpton admitted to Chafets that the song made him laugh.

Not only does Limbaugh not scapegoat women or minorities, he is just as politically correct as his opponents, in some ways even more so. His belief in equality and color-blindness is unshakable. “I want everyone to experience the greatness of this country. And they can,” he tells Chafets. “Stop thinking of yourself as a hyphenated American.” Defenders of affirmative action and other race-conscious policies observe that it’s not as easy as Limbaugh supposes for blacks to rise in this country. Empirically, they are quite correct. Limbaugh, however, is not interested in the causes of racial inequality. For him, any man can succeed, regardless of color. This is not racism but the opposite: Limbaugh’s belief in equality is willfully impervious to all evidence to the contrary.

Limbaugh’s liberal critics lastly charge that talk radio coarsens political dis-

course. To this, Limbaugh has a familiar retort: both he and mainstream media have ideological biases, but at least he acknowledges his. Which is better (or worse) cannot be resolved here. Meanwhile, much of the “coarsening” is only apparent. In 2008, Democrats ran an ad quoting Limbaugh calling Mexicans “stupid and unskilled” and telling them to “shut your mouth or you get out.” The first quotation, it later transpired, came from a 1993 monologue where Limbaugh stated that NAFTA would cause “unskilled, stupid Mexicans” to replace “unskilled, stupid Americans,” while the second turned out to be Limbaugh’s summary of Mexico’s own laws governing foreign nationals. On another occasion, reporters repeated as accurate an apocryphal quote by Limbaugh praising Martin Luther King Jr. assassin James Earl Ray. The pervasive stereotype of an angry white man provoking hatred makes the media oblivious to Limbaugh’s satire, which in turn causes them to overestimate the alleged ugliness of Limbaugh’s show.

Conservatives’ critique of Limbaugh is more subtle, as Limbaugh is one of them. Indeed, one complaint—that right-wing talk radio alienates independents and moderates—borders on preciousness. Independents may not like Limbaugh, but for better or worse, he does galvanize GOP partisans. Nobody knows which effect predominates, but talk radio probably does more to help the GOP than hobble it. Pundits went cock-a-hoop when Rahm Emanuel called Rush Limbaugh “the voice and the intellectual force and energy behind the Republican Party,” and Obama told GOP leaders, “You can’t just listen to Rush Limbaugh and get things done.” Two comments in a row about Rush Limbaugh—clearly this was a calculated White House media strategy! Pundits savvy enough to discern the scheme overlooked that independents and moderates do not follow politics closely enough to do the same. For them, Rush Limbaugh will never be salient enough to matter.

A more serious complaint is that talk radio drowns out thoughtful conser-

vatism. Rush Limbaugh et al. do not waste their time engaging the best possible arguments for the other side. To keep their audience entertained, they instead rely on a stock of techniques that create the illusion that they have triumphed over all who disagree with them. First, they cherry-pick their opponents' most foolish statements. Second, they restate the other side's ideas only in their most extreme and unlimited form. Finally, they impute to them only the most nefarious motives. Follow these techniques and voila! You, too, can gratify your friends and enrage your enemies.

To his credit, Limbaugh pulls off this performance with winking braggadocio. Hailing, he says, from the "Excellence in Broadcasting Network," he is right "97.9% of the time," and "with talent on loan from God" can refute liberals "with half his brain tied behind his back, just to make it fair." Only when Limbaugh drops the humor does the poverty of his ideas become obvious. At last year's Conservative Political Action Committee, Limbaugh delivered a long extemporaneous speech on what conservatives believe. It used all the usual techniques. Limbaugh quoted foolish statements made by Democrats (Joe Biden not remembering the name of a website he had touted, Hillary Clinton using an awkward turn of phrase suggesting that she would willfully refuse to believe anything David Petraeus said), formulated Democratic and progressive ideas so as to sound as extreme as possible (liberal policies become "this collectivism socialism stuff" and "punishment of the achievers"), and imputed wicked motives to Democrats and liberals (at bottom, said Limbaugh, they just want to control others, a theory he falsely attributed to F.A. Hayek). Limbaugh at his most serious is unable or unwilling to understand what his opponents actually believe.

That talk radio does not thoughtfully engage the other side, however, does not mean it is bad for conservatism. To establish the latter conclusion, critics also need to show that it makes thoughtful conservatism from other outlets less

likely. How does Rush Limbaugh humming into his microphone in Florida make an ambitious young conservative writer in New York less reflective? It's hard to tell. Talk-radio hosts have, one suspects, become whipping boys for others' crimes. Conservative critics of talk radio complain that thoughtful conservatism is in decline. Afraid to name names, however, they instead choose relatively easy targets, namely, talk-radio hosts. Sensing that they are the ones being rebuked, the official custodians of "thoughtful conservatism" then leap to the defense of talk radio.

This travesty of a real disagreement has been replayed several times now. Just recently, Jim Manzi—noting that perhaps conservatives could be more critical of their own—took the trouble to dissect talk-radio host Mark Levin's argument denying that human activity has caused global warming. Manzi observed that Levin rested his case on an argument from authority (not to mention several arguments ad hominem, on which Manzi chose not to dwell), but the authorities to which he appealed either had no expertise in climate science or else did not actually reject anthropogenic global warming. On cue, as if to prove Manzi correct, two *National Review* writers upbraided Manzi, not for making unsound points, but for criticizing a fellow conservative and making him look ridiculous. Movement conservatives take attacks on talk-radio hosts surprisingly personally. If I am right, the reason is that they see little difference between their efforts and those of talk-radio hosts.

Still, talk radio is at worst emblematic of conservative intellectual decline, not a cause of it. Yes, in the age of talk radio, conservatism has become less high-brow. In the late 1990s, for example, *National Review* transformed itself from a fortnightly magazine into a daily webzine. (To be sure, the magazine *National Review* is still printed, but to little interest or acclaim.) Meanwhile, conservative journalists and media personalities flood the marketplace with

low- or middlebrow bestsellers. Rush Limbaugh proved that conservatism could be popular and profitable. Not surprisingly, many aspire to a share of the lucre.

The highness of a work's "brow," however, is not a measure of its merit or thoughtfulness, however much the inventors of the "brow" categories, principally Dwight Macdonald, conflated the two. Brow is a measure of the effort and background knowledge required to understand a particular work. Thoughtfulness, by contrast, is the degree to which a work considers, understands, and responds to opposing arguments. The conservative movement has many, perhaps even a surfeit of upper-middle-brow organs—*The New Criterion* and *The Claremont Review of Books*, for example. They are not necessarily any more thoughtful for appealing to a more educated audience than Limbaugh, however. For decades, top-tier intellectual talent flowed in the conservative movement's direction. In the past 15 or 20 years, the tide has reversed. A year does not pass now without at least one conservative intellectual repudiating ties to the movement.

The one criticism of talk radio that does hit the mark is that it has blinded listeners to the faults of the Republican Party. Has it ever. Chafets describes Rush Limbaugh's support for the Iraq War:

This was war, flat-out, and he wanted it fought no-holds-barred, without nuances or niceties, World War II-style. Limbaugh realized, as many more sophisticated commentators did not, that the [9/11] attack on America was not an isolated criminal act launched by a group of fanatics operating out of Afghanistan. If it had been, there would not be cheering on the rooftops of Baghdad, Ramallah, Cairo and Damascus and Teheran. This was the logical next step in the wild anti-Americanism that had dominated Middle Eastern political culture ... for decades. Limbaugh

didn't believe in winning the hearts and minds of these enemies; he had no respect for either. What he wanted was a victory so brutal and so decisive that it would leave the countries of the Middle East prostrate and remorseful, like the Germans and Japanese of an earlier era. Afghanistan was a good place to start, if that's what Bush wanted, but capitulation [sic] would mean a killer punch into the centers of the enemy. Baghdad was one of those centers. ... Total war was justified until the Arabs cried uncle.

In other words, the U.S. should retaliate not just against those who attacked us on 9/11, but against whole regions whose sole fault was that they contained anti-American populations. Not only that, but the U.S. should wage "total war" against them, such as was waged against the Germans and Japanese (you know, with bombing civilians). Commendably, Chafets does not downplay Limbaugh's views—perhaps, indeed, he is perversely exaggerating them. Instead, he leaves the immorality and futility of Limbaugh's post-9/11 policy recommendations—wage war against whole peoples merely to punish them for having misguided opinions—lying in the open like an unburied corpse.

Talk-radio hosts should be blamed for promoting these attitudes. But they are not alone. Most movement outlets, including the most highbrow, promoted them as well, without hesitation or apology. Even today, movement conservatives will read the passage cited above and not think anything of it. Many will doubtless nod approvingly.

Talk radio is not what ails the American Right. If anything, it adds redeeming virtues. Rush Limbaugh and his songwriter, Paul Shanklin, bring a more consistent level of excellence to conservatism than perhaps anyone else in the movement. Many others share their faults—just without being as funny. ■

Austin Bramwell is a freelance writer living in New York City.

[*The World That Never Was: A True Story of Dreamers, Schemers, Anarchists, and Secret Agents, Alex Butterworth, Pantheon, 496 pages*]

Are Anarchists Revolting?

By Kirkpatrick Sale

TO SAY THAT THIS BOOK is a total fraud is not completely to discredit it, but to recognize that though it purports to be about the "schemers and anarchists" of its subtitle, it is really more about the "secret agents" of the national and municipal governments of the late 19th century and how they spied on and encouraged those subversives. This should come as no shock, given that the bulk of its research is based on the records of London's Special Branch, the Hoover Institute's Russian Okhrana archive, the Paris Prefecture of Police agents' reports, and various records from spy agencies in Brussels, Moscow, London, Heidelberg, and Geneva.

Yet it does surprise because Alex Butterworth claims that his book examines various revolutionaries and radicals in the period between the Paris Commune of 1871 and the Russian Revolution of 1905, all with the purpose of showing how they were so very like the terrorists of today. It is based on his feeling, looking back on the 19th century, "that the intervening century has somehow folded back upon itself" and that the "secret clockwork of intrigue and manipulation to protect the status quo" that operated back then is like the one operating today. Once stated in the introduction, however, that connection is never studied, never proved. Can we escape the conviction that it was tacked onto an academic examination of police agents and spies at some creative editor's suggestion with a thought to boosting sales?

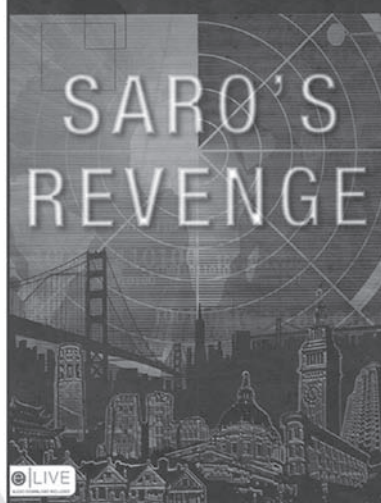
Worse still, in order to justify some connection between the quasi-revolutionaries of the 19th century and con-

temporary terrorists, the book is forced to call any act of violence and any march or meeting of malcontents the work of "anarchists." Butterworth knows better, but he freely adopts the view of the establishment commentators of the day who often labeled as "anarchists" people that were nothing of the sort and who knew nothing of the distinctions between anarchists, revolutionaries, nihilists, socialists, Marxists, union agitators, subversives, iconoclasts, resisters, Irish revolutionaries, and anti-Tsarists. If the word "anarchist" today evokes images of dark *Mad Magazine* characters holding round bombs with burning fuses—and, alas, it too often does—it is because of the politically ignorant, ill-spirited, and propagandistic nonsense of that earlier time that Butterworth does nothing to challenge.

In fact, what the book proves, though hardly meaning to, is the truth that the anarchists of that day were so far from being terrorists in any sense of the word

Terrorists Control U.S. Senators, and the world trembles.

LUCAS STARR



God save us all!

A new Thriller written by Lucas Starr
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that they often failed to get their ideas across as forcefully as they wished. Butterworth spends a good deal of time on Peter Kropotkin and Élisée Reclus, for example, two men who would proudly bear the title of anarchist but, for all their hatred of the status quo and desire for an end to the evils of capitalism, had nothing intentionally to do with bombthrowers or assassins. It's a point that Butterworth, though he clearly knows it to be true, never acknowledges.

Kropotkin, though frequently a target of the spies and mercenaries of various countries' secret police, gave the world the brilliant scientific theory of "mutual aid," arguing that it was an evolutionary emphasis on cooperation instead of competition in the Darwinian sense that made for the success of species, including the human. He did at one point say that "acts of illegal protest ... by lonely sentinels" might be necessary from time to time to effect change in the political regimes of Europe, but he insisted that his argument stemmed from an adherence to a morality that stood in opposition to the immorality on which "today's society is founded."

And at one point Butterworth tells of a dinner between Kropotkin and the writer who became Ford Madox Ford:

'There must be no destruction,' he confided to Ford, in the softest of voices, as they sat in an alcove off the grand Grill Room of the Holborn Restaurant, the dishes clattering around them. 'We must build in the hearts of men. We must establish a kingdom of God.'

Despite such plain evidence, Butterworth has no trouble commingling the words "anarchist" and "terrorist."

He thus misses the special beauty of Kropotkin's work in political theory. With *Mutual Aid* especially, and later with *Fields, Factories, and Workshops*, Kropotkin was able to move away from the absurdist limitations of individual anarchism and no-laws anarchism that had flourished during this period and provide instead a vision of communal anarchism, following the models of

independent cooperative communities he discovered while developing his theory of mutual aid. It was an anarchism that opposed centralized government and state-level laws as traditional anarchism did, but understood that at a certain small scale, communities and communes and co-ops could flourish and provide humans with a rich material life and wide areas of liberty without centralized control.

As for Reclus, at this point he also had no taste for going around stirring up terrorists and in fact was busy writing his multi-volume *Universal Geography*, an examination of every continent and country in terms of the effects that geographic features like rivers and mountains had on human populations—and vice versa. He was involved in the sectarian wrangling between anarchists and varieties of socialists over who better championed what Marx saw as the working class and was adamantly against the kind of violence that some of the socialists advocated.

In seeing Reclus only in terms of terrorism, Butterworth completely neglects the role Reclus played in political theory during these years. His geographical work, thoroughly researched and unflinchingly scientific, laid out a picture of human-nature interaction that we today would call bioregionalism. It showed, with more detail than anyone but a dedicated geographer could possibly absorb, how the ecology of a place determined the kinds of lives and livelihoods its denizens would have and thus how people could properly live in self-regarding and self-determined bioregions without the interference of large and centralized governments that always try to homogenize diverse geographical areas.

So the book fails to understand the anarchism of the late 19th century that is its supposed subject and thus in its attempt to link that with modern-day terrorism. It is really unfair to ask readers to go through 500 pages of not very pliable (in some places downright impenetrable) prose to discover that. But it has a certain value in terms of its real if unstated sub-

ject, which is to show just how extensive, manipulative, and insidious the secret police of Europe's governments and municipalities were. Indeed, one comes away with the distinct impression—which will not be unfamiliar to those knowing of our own government's actions in the 1950s and '60s (COINTELPRO, anyone?)—that a great deal of the overt violence at this time was caused directly by undercover secret agents or provocateurs paid by them.

To take just one example, Butterworth shows that a plot in 1887 by the Irish revolutionaries to blow up Queen Victoria and her ministers at a thanksgiving ceremony at Westminster Abbey was entirely invented by agents of the British police, abetted by the Conservative government then in power. They claimed that the scheme had been foiled by a delay in the ship carrying the militants and their munitions from America that allowed the police to thwart the plot and save her majesty from the dastardly violence that revolutionaries and terrorists habitually committed. More shameful still, the concocted plot was not aimed so much at the Fenian radicals in Ireland as at trying to discredit the great Irish statesman Charles Stewart Parnell and other moderates who were working legally through Parliament to advance Home Rule for Ireland. It was, in other words, an unscrupulous fraud that perpetuated the idea of a world of revolutionary terror for shameful, petty, Tory political ends.

After reading through this whole book, I never did figure out what the title means. Perhaps it refers to the world that the undercover agents and spies created and sold to the public about the dangerous revolutionaries in their midst, one that never really existed but served to enlarge and enrich the governments that created it. That could be, and would in itself make the anarchists' case for them, but Butterworth never says so. ■

Kirkpatrick Sale is the author of 12 books, most recently After Eden: The Evolution of Human Dominance, and is the director of the Middlebury Institute.

[*Freedom for Sale: Why the World Is Trading Democracy for Security*, John Kampfner, Basic Books, 294 pages]

Global Undemocratic Revolution

By James Bovard

Freedom for Sale is the best synopsis of the recent collapse of restraints on government power. John Kampfner, the editor of Britain's *New Statesman*, traveled the world seeking to answer the question: why have freedoms been so easily traded in return for security or prosperity?

Kampfner begins his tour in Singapore, where he was born. Lee Kuan Yew's 30-year reign as prime minister begat an authoritarian regime that combined high economic growth with endless petty impingements on personal liberties. Lee's sense of entitlement to power knew no bounds—he even chose spouses for senior government workers and dictated how many children they should have. With immaculate streets and the world's highest rate of executions, Singapore earned the nickname “Disneyland with the death penalty.”

While many Americans know that chewing gum is illegal in Singapore, they are unaware that until recently oral sex was punishable by two years in prison. The government has almost totally repressed political opposition. When journalists or others criticize, they are bankrupted by volleys of defamation suits. Kampfner notes, “People confide only in their good friends here; meaningful opinion polls do not exist.” But as long as the economy has boomed, there has been little or no resistance to authoritarianism.

Kampfner spent two stints as a journalist in Russia, one before and one after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He writes, “The West's overall approach during the

1990s was a mix of condescension, ingratiation, and insensitivity.” Perceived U.S. government meddling in Georgia in late 2003, which helped install Mikheil Saakashvili in power, was a turning point for the Russians, compounded by the U.S. intervention in the Ukrainian election the following year.

Freedom flourished in Russia after the Soviet Union collapsed, but has faded in the new century. Media criticism of the Russian regime is tempered by routine assassinations of bothersome reporters. According to the Russian Union of Journalists, “more than two hundred journalists have been killed in 10 years. In not a single case has the mastermind been arrested.” Putin and his cohorts routinely refer to “*zhurnalyuga*—journalist-scum.” Even organizations that merely document the crimes of the Stalin era have been targeted for police raids and repression, since they interfere with Putin's effort to revive patriotic fervor.

Putin's power has been practically unlimited since Boris Yeltsin crowned him as his successor. The Russian parliament has rubberstamped laws punishing “antistate behavior” that grant “the security services the right to kill enemies of the state at home and abroad. Another gives law enforcement agencies the right to view acts of dissent

deceased. Kampfner writes, “For nearly 30 years, these shoot-to-kill encounters have been a regular occurrence in the major cities, and, according to public opinion polls, they are highly popular with the public.” The Indian parliament passed sweeping anti-terrorism legislation in 2002 that gave the government power to detain terrorist suspects for up to a year without bail. Other anti-terrorism laws entitle authorities to arrest “relatives as hostages when a person wanted by the police absconds.” India's democratic pretensions have not stood in the way of horrific attacks by Hindu mobs on minority Muslims, sometimes aided and abetted by the police.

In some democracies, governing is indistinguishable from looting. In Italy after World War II, “a system of state larceny was enshrined.” Until the early 1990s, Italian politics was “denuded of respectability and credibility, and rotted to the core by corruption,” Kampfner remarks. After a two-year crackdown on thieving weasels, Italy reverted to form. This worked out well for Silvio Berlusconi, the media baron who snared three terms as president. He showed contempt for any limits on his own power and repeatedly pushed through parliament laws giving himself total legal immunity, regardless of what crimes he

WHILE MANY AMERICANS KNOW THAT **CHEWING GUM IS ILLEGAL IN SINGAPORE**, THEY ARE UNAWARE THAT UNTIL RECENTLY **ORAL SEX WAS PUNISHABLE BY TWO YEARS IN PRISON.**

as forms of extremism or treason, crimes punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Treason has been redefined to include damaging Russia's constitutional order.”

India is the world's most populous democracy, but it is far more authoritarian than most Westerners recognize. “Police encounters” is the colloquial term for police killings, which are routinely open-air executions followed by the ritual planting of a weapon on the

might commit. He vigorously pressured the media to stifle criticism, including successfully pressuring one television channel to cancel a late night political satire that mocked him.

Kampfner wonders, “In a democracy, how can a leader who has openly set about to destroy an independent media and independent judiciary, and whose personal finances are murky at best, command such popularity?”

Yet as long as Berlusconi denounces

Communists and socialists, many Italians accept him as the incarnation of freedom. Last year, he broadened his political base by incorporating another political party into his own and naming the combination The People of Freedom. "We are the party of Italians who love freedom and who want to remain free," he declared. And Berlusconi must have absolute legal immunity so that he will have unfettered power to fight the enemies of freedom.

This issue flared up briefly in the election campaign that ended on May 6. Blair's successor as prime minister, Gordon Brown, was wearing a microphone for a TV network as he went out and talked to commoners. He ran into one elderly widow who complained about immigrants. After he returned to his chauffeured car, he groused that the woman was a "bigot" and wanted to know which aide allowed her to talk to him. Typical stuff for lordly politicians—

gal wiretapping program that eavesdropped on thousands of Americans' phone calls and e-mails without warrants. After the *New York Times* exposed the program, Bush bragged about it in his State of the Union address and received a standing ovation from Republican members of Congress.

The more oppressive U.S. policies became, the more servile the media acted. Even after the Abu Ghraib photos and John Yoo's "presidential torture entitlement" memo surfaced, most newspapers and magazines ducked the issue. This pattern was locked in place by late 2001, when Attorney General John Ashcroft declared, "those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty ... only aid terrorists for they erode our national unity and ... give ammunition to America's enemies." Even if the critics were accurate, they were still traitors.

One of the nation's most prominent pundits, Michael Kinsley, admitted in 2002 that he had been listening to his "inner Ashcroft": "As a writer and editor, I have been censoring myself and others quite a bit since September 11." Kinsley conceded that sometimes it was "simple cowardice" that sparked the censorship. Kampfnr notes the intense pressure on American commentators during the war on terror and observes, "the most sensitive issue of them all was policy toward Israel." Criticizing Israel after 9/11 was as prudent as praising Stalin during the Cold War.

Freedom for Sale places much of the blame for democracy's decline on the pursuit of wealth at any price. Politicians who praise free markets often receive *carte blanche* to abuse constitutions. But free markets by themselves are not inherently depraving. Democracy is floundering in part because politicians gorged on power for decades.

This is the age of Leviathan Democracy. The bigger government grows, the more clueless citizens become. The contract between rulers and ruled is replaced by a blank check. Government becomes an elective dictatorship,

DURING THE DECADE OF BLAIR'S RULE, PARLIAMENT CREATED MORE THAN 3,000 NEW CRIMINAL OFFENSES.

The chapter on the United Kingdom is the strongest part of the book. During the decade of Blair's rule, Parliament created "more than 3,000 new criminal offenses. That corresponded to two new offenses for each day Parliament sat during Blair's premiership." British citizens are treated like a mass of undicted criminal conspirators. The UK is now the most surveilled nation on earth, with over 5 million closed-circuit television cameras sweeping the streets, waiting to detect anyone publicly urinating or committing any of a long list of other offenses. The cameras automatically recognize license plates and faces, as well as "suspicious behavior." New software issues an alert when "people are walking suspiciously or strangely." The CCTVs in some places are equipped with loudspeakers to permit government officials to shout at people who litter. In Liverpool, drones hover 100 yards above the ground lurking for scofflaws. Their loudspeakers startle Brits foolish enough to believe no one is watching their mischief.

The Blair regime also helped unleash a tidal wave of wiretaps. Government agencies are requesting approval for more than 300,000 wiretap operations a year—probably a hundred times more than the corresponding rate of administrations in the United States. (Illicit wiretaps are another story: the U.S. may far surpass Britain on that score.)

except that his microphone was still on. One Twitter user quipped, "Gordon Brown has created a total surveillance society. Glad to see he got caught out, now he knows how we all feel."

Once a government has become committed to achieving omniscience over its subjects, any half-witted justification for expanding the dragnet suffices. After the British government created the largest DNA database in the world, ministers urged that "police be allowed to take the DNA of anyone stopped for not wearing seatbelts." When people balked at a mandatory national identification card with extensive biometric data, Charles Clarke, the home secretary, declared that the proposal was a "profoundly civil libertarian measure because it promotes the most fundamental civil liberty in our society, which is the right to live free from crime and fear." After promising freedom from fear, a politician can always invoke polls showing widespread fears to justify seizing new power. The more people government frightens, the more benevolent its dictatorial policies appear.

But nowhere is the recent decline of democracy more evident than in the United States. After the 9/11 terror attacks, President George W. Bush effectively suspended habeas corpus and claimed a right to detain anyone in perpetuity on his own say so. The National Security Agency launched a massive ille-

and elections merely signify whose turn it is to trample the Constitution. Because people have been taught to expect their rulers to save them from all perils, they cheer any action that either boosts their benefits or assuages their fears. Because the media relies on government “news” handouts, it ignores most official abuses and instead whines about the perils of citizens distrusting their masters.

Kampfner complains about the collapse of “redistributive democracy” in recent years. But politicians are buying more votes than ever before. At the state and local level in the U.S., government employees and pensioners often have a death grip on everyone else’s paychecks. Government entitlement spending is pushing nation after nation towards insolvency.

He also contends that politicians have “opted out of economic rule-making.” Maybe in Singapore, but not in the United States. It was politicians and political appointees who poured far too much credit into the housing sector, causing one of the biggest boom-and-busts in American history. It was politicians who created a new ad hoc “rule” that entitled them to bail out Wall Street and a host of financial institutions that richly deserved bankruptcy. It is politicians who empower and shield the Federal Reserve, permitting it to manipulate everyone’s finances according to secret rules that provide the greatest benefit to insiders.

The ultimate threat to democracy’s survival may be the fact that many people simply do not value their own freedom. When elections degenerate into a search for benevolent caretakers and cage-keepers, authoritarianism is almost guaranteed to win on Election Day. *Freedom for Sale* is a powerful wake-up call for anyone who still believes in the inevitable global triumph of democracy. ■

James Bovard is the author of Attention Deficit Democracy, Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty, and seven other books.

[*Design and Truth*, Robert Grudin, Yale University Press, 224 pages]

Building Character

By Deborah K. Dietsch

FROM THE RENAISSANCE onward, architects and designers have considered themselves bearers of great truths. Drawing on this history, Robert Grudin argues in *Design and Truth* for aesthetic honesty as an antidote to the unethical practices of today. Beauty, he insists, should not serve the whims of authority: “If good design tells the truth, poor design tells a lie, a lie usually related, in one way or another, to the getting or abuse of power.”

But this book is not really about design, at least not in a conventional sense. It cuts a large swath through culture, covering literature, politics, philosophy, music, and computers, to interpret design as a metaphor for creative thought in any field. “It calls for us to create a unity of part with whole,” he writes, “a finished product that is harmonious with society and with nature.”

Unfortunately for creators, even life itself pales in significance before Grudin’s uncompromising aesthetic. And the power that puts artistic excellence at risk can be that of the market as well as that of the despot. A professor emeritus at the University of Oregon, Grudin can’t always appreciate the demands of designing a building or a product in the world of commerce. As the late Philip Johnson once quipped, “Architects are pretty much high-class whores. We can turn down projects the way that they can turn down some clients, but we’ve both got to say yes to someone if we want to stay in business.”

Grudin would prefer that creators say no—even at the cost of their own lives. His book begins with an account of the 16th-century Japanese Buddhist priest Sen no Rikyu, who devised an austere

elegant tea ceremony. So dear to him was this ritual that Rikyu would not hasten it even for a meeting with warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi. Nor would he revise the ceremony at the autocrat’s behest. Enraged, Hideyoshi ordered the priest to commit suicide. In uncompromising style, Rikyu obeyed.

Such is the price of integrity. But the cost of compromising an artistic vision is even higher, Grudin argues. He describes architect Minoru Yamasaki as a “tragic hero” whose fatal flaw—fatal, that is, for the inhabitants of the World Trade Center—was his willingness to grant his client’s wish to increase the height of the twin towers from 80 to 110 stories. He also agreed to create large, unencumbered floor plates by reducing the number of stairways from six to three and moving the buildings’ structural supports from the inside to the outside skin.

Grudin mischaracterizes Yamasaki’s design as “unstable, inhibiting, ugly, unsafe,” when in fact it used innovative engineering techniques to ensure the towers’ durability. Steel supports in the exterior walls sustained gravity loads from above and wind gusts from the sides. The World Trade Center was not defectively designed. No architect could have anticipated what would happen when two fuel-laden aircraft struck the buildings.

But Grudin goes further. He argues that the conspicuous towers were targeted by al-Qaeda because they were “symbols of Satanic power” as well as icons of capitalistic greed. The architect violated a sacred Muslim code in borrowing imagery from mosques and holy sites for a secular purpose. Osama bin Laden, Grudin asserts, may have seen Yamasaki as “some sort of Darth Vader” because of his attempts to westernize Islamic architecture. (Before tackling the World Trade Center, the architect had designed an air terminal in Saudi Arabia built by the bin Laden construction company). All of this seems far-fetched, given that the towers’ vertical ribs can just as easily be compared to the tracery of Gothic cathedrals as the pat-

terning of a mosque. Surely Osama bin Laden had other things on his mind in 2001 than the meaning of architecture.

Whether or not the towers were an affront to bin Laden's sensibility, they certainly did not match Grudin's idea of good, truth-telling design, which he believes should reflect simplicity, practicality, cost-effectiveness, humanistic values, and harmony with nature. He abhors "over-design" as a "pack of lies," citing St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and "The Gates" art installation in Central Park as two of the worst offenders. No matter that St. Peter's acquired architectural richness through its magnificent additions (think of Bernini's colonnades) or that the saffron-curtained spectacle created by artist Christo and his late wife Jeanne-Claude spurred the public to see Frederick Law Olmsted's picturesque landscape in a fresh way.

In condemning these designs, Grudin fails to acknowledge how environments change over time to convey meanings not always intended from their inception. Grudin's biggest failing is his clinging to an outdated idea of honest designs rooted in the modernist mantra of "form follows function," a phrase coined in 1896 by Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. Upholding the furniture of Charles Eames and Bill Stumpf (designer of the ergonomic Aeron chair) as the perfect embodiment of that principle, Grudin finds few redeeming qualities in the complexities and contradictions of postmodern and contemporary designs.

The brilliant Italian designer Ettore Sottsass, for example, whose whimsical postmodern furnishings broke new ground, is unfairly compared to Nazi architect Albert Speer. Sottsass worked for Olivetti—Italy's answer to IBM, not the SS—to push modern design in a more playful direction. His 1969 Valentine typewriter, now a classic, was followed by quirky furnishings reflecting the irreverent spirit of the 1980s. Grudin can't see the uncompromising nature of this design because Sottsass's off-kilter creations don't fit with his beloved form-follows-function philosophy.

In the second half of the book, Grudin traces the development of modern attitudes toward design beginning in the 16th century. He attributes their origins to Italian painter and theorist Giorgio Vasari, who explained Leonardo da Vinci's achievements in terms of ideas rather than technique. By the late 19th century, design as a distinct discipline emerged through the efforts of British theorist William Morris, who introduced the concept of integrated interior design so that the furnishings would share the same beauty as their settings.

One of the more sensible chapters in *Design and Truth* is devoted to the importance of design centered on human values. Using the example of Thomas Jefferson, Grudin stresses the need to revive humanism, "a study of history and observation of real-world interactions." As Grudin notes, this approach has been neglected in the academy, where "Marxists call it a bourgeois fantasy" and "Fundamentalists curse it as the work of the devil." Humanism deserves to be renewed, he argues, as a way to ensure that truth and power remain on equal footing.

From this conservative position on higher education, Grudin turns his sights to politics and business. In a chapter on design rooted in knowledge, he blasts former President George W. Bush for trying to export democracy abroad, "much the way Virginia exports hams." He points out how Bush's plan for invading Iraq "flew in the face of reality" by ignoring the lack of infrastructure necessary for democracy in that nation. Liberty can be designed, he believes, but not without a culture ready for it.

The author argues that paying greater attention to design can help us avoid the pitfalls of free-market economics as well, pointing to Microsoft's antitrust troubles and the Enron disaster as illustrations of the need for corporations to self-regulate. He recounts his own efforts to write guiding principles for a high-tech start-up, suggesting that "corporations can empower the consumer by creating products that enhance social consciousness, educate, challenge,

improve communications and amplify independence." Unsurprisingly, the company's CEO didn't buy into the strategy, insisting he needed more freedom to run his business.

Grudin believes that corporations would be well served by hiring CKOs, chief knowledge officers, who would oversee the flow and exchange of ideas from both inside and outside their businesses. He holds up Google as a model of trafficking in information to create new value, but he ignores the negative consequences of its commanding position in the search-engine market. This is something of a blind spot, since he otherwise sees freedom as endangered by market excesses as well as political abuses. To corporations, he writes, "liberty is little more than a piggybank and a permissive marketplace." The last American president to advance liberty against moneyed interests, according to Grudin, was Theodore Roosevelt, whom he praises for revolutionizing our national infrastructure.

"We can correct our errors as long as we do not remain the victims of our own poor designs," he contends. In his eyes, that advice applies to rulers as well as refrigerators. He might find more reasons for optimism, though, if he moved on from praising old-style modernism to appreciating newer concepts in architecture and design. ■

A trained architect, Washington-based freelancer Deborah K. Dietsch writes on art, architecture, and design. Her latest book is Live/Work: Working at Home, Living at Work.

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St. Dennis of the Bleachers

Opening day for the Batavia Muckdogs approaches and with it the resumption of a long, leisurely, blissful conversation in which living and dead participate.

(Alas, the dead sometimes play third base or catch for our team.)

I feel intensely the presence of those who have shared these many hundreds—maybe a thousand, by now—evenings of my life at Dwyer Stadium. Let me tell you about one such ghost.

The last time I saw Dennis Bowler was in September 2004, during one of those melancholy late-season games when the chill of summer's end is in the air, and even though I haven't darkened a classroom door for decades the thought of school lours over me like a prison sentence.

Dennis had been sick for a couple of weeks with a mystery ailment. But even at half-speed, Dennis was irrepressible.

"See ya tomorrow night," we both said as he left the third-base bleachers in the 12th inning for the drive back to Gasport. It didn't work out that way. Dennis made it home that night and then dropped dead of a heart attack.

If ever you were minding your own business at a Western New York ballpark or high school gym and you were buttonholed by a fast-talking man telling you everything he knew about nuclear physics, British Columbia, or how to make a baseball bat, it was Dennis Bowler.

He loved to talk. He talked more than any person I have ever met, often about his ancestors or daily life in Niagara County. For a frenetic man, he was content in his place, fully at home. His stories included such local characters as

the unfortunately named Israel "Izzy" Humen, for whom Dennis had an overwhelming sympathy. He hated meanness and cruelty. I suspect he had been teased and mocked more than once, and he repaid the world not in bitterness but in kindness.

Dennis loved those names and numbers that spice our lives but that we depreciate with the word "trivia." He'd ask you to name the vice president of the Confederacy (Alexander Stephens) or Hank Greenberg's lifetime home run total (331). He could recite the starting lineup of every girls softball team in the Genesee Region League.

When Dennis turned 60 in August 2004, the Muckdogs' announcer asked him to stand up and take a bow. Dennis was so busy yakking that he never heard the chorus of "Happy Birthday."

Even then, he looked 40 and acted like a coltish boy. He would race teenagers for foul balls. When he got one he'd hold it aloft, beaming like a prospector who'd just panned a gold nugget. Then he'd give it to a child.

Dennis resided in the family homestead on Ridge Road, fruitbasket of the Northeast. He lived alone and drove a rusting jalopy distinguished by its varying shades of blue. Now and then he'd stop by my parents' house to pour water down its chronically leaky radiator.

He farmed as many acres as he could and sold his produce at a roadside stand. He brought corn to the games

and gave it away. He also painted houses, taught hunter-safety courses, drove a tractor for Becker Farms, and in winter he substituted at local schools. No kid who ever had Mr. Bowler as a sub forgot him.

Dennis worked hard and with an almost beatific cheerfulness, but he could not afford health insurance. He hadn't visited a doctor in many years. What if? Yeah, what if.

One abiding memory of Dennis: in his last summer, he brought a telescope to Dwyer Stadium. Not to check out the chicks; rather, Mars was at its closest approach in millennia, so he trained the scope on the Red Planet and the moon, and we took our peeks.

Dennis was so utterly without guile, so joyful, so ravenous for knowledge. He lacked entirely the internal brake that keeps most people from bringing telescopes to baseball games. And good for him.

During that game Dennis ran over to the first-base bleachers and taped a napkin to the fence. He dashed back, pointed the telescope at the napkin, and asked our then 10-year-old daughter to take a look. It read HI GRETTEL.

He was such a sweet, innocent man, poor in purse but rich in spirit. Sometimes I think of Dennis keeling over in his bathroom, perhaps at 3 a.m., the soul's midnight, as Ray Bradbury calls it. But more often I think of him bounding up the bleacher steps two at a time, talking about Western Canada, running after foul balls, telling Gretel corny jokes, and smiling. Always smiling.

It's been almost six years now and I suspect he's still talking St. Peter's ear off. ■

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